

The Bodhisattva Path
Study material for your retreat at Tiratanaloka

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Introduction to the Handbook

The purpose of this handbook is to give you the opportunity to look in depth at the material that we will be studying on the **The Bodhisattva Path** retreat at Tiratanaloka.

Before this handbook was produced, we asked people to do some background reading for the retreat and then provided specific material to study in the form of talks during the retreat itself. The advantage of that approach was that we were able to incorporate current issues and thinking into our talks and discussion groups. However we also realised that this approach didn't give retreatants the chance to consider the material in depth before they came, and it put those who don't have English as their first language at a considerable disadvantage.

In this handbook we give you material to study look at for each area we'll be studying on the retreat. For each topic there is some specific reading we would ask you to do before you come. The reading is extracts from Sangharakshita and Subhuti's teachings in the form of seminars, papers and talks. These different formats give a few different ways into Sangharaskhita's thought which is explored informally in the form of questions and answers, less formally in talks and fully worked out in the papers Subhuti wrote in consultation with Sangharakshita. All are introductions to Sangharaskhita's unique perspective on the Bodhisattva Path and the 'altruistic dimension of Going for Refuge'. We will also have some talks on the retreat itself where the team will bring out their own personal reflections on the topics covered.

Required reading is shown in a box at the start of each of the three topics of study, and **optional extra study material** is shown after that. Some of the optional material is in the form of talks that can be downloaded from the Free Buddhist Audio website at www.freebuddhistaudio.com. These aren't by any means exhaustive - Free Buddhist Audio is growing and changing all the time so you may find other material equally relevant!

We'd ask you to study this material, reflect on it and come prepared with questions and areas you would like to discuss as this will help you to get the most out of your retreat. You might even want to study the material with some of your friends. Throughout the material we've included questions about how the material relates to your own practice that we'd like you to think about in preparation for the discussion groups on the retreat.

It's important that you let us know if you have problems accessing any of the material we've asked you to read, as we'll be assuming that you have had a chance to look at it before you come.

All of us on the team at Tiratanaloka look forward to studying the material with you when you come here.

Study area 1. The Bodhicitta

Summary and Reading

The first topic we will be studying on this retreat is Sangharakshita's teaching on the Bodhicitta.

The information below is a summary of the main points taken from talks given by the team at Tiratanaloka as well as extracts from seminars, talks and papers written by Sangharakshita and Subhuti. It provides a summary of the main areas we'll be looking at, as well as some questions we'd like you to consider.

Required reading

We ask you to read Subhuti's paper '**A Supra-Personal Force**'. You can download this in PDF format from Subhuti's website at <http://subhuti.info/essays>. This 2011 paper is the result of a series of discussions between Sangharakshita and Subhuti. You can also download as a PDF or buy a book with all their '**Seven Papers**' together. This will be useful for all our retreats at Tiratanaloka. <http://www.lulu.com/gb/en/shop/subhuti-and-sangharakshita/seven-papers/paperback/product-21746853.html>

Optional study material

If you have completed Year 3 module 5, 'The Bodhisattva Ideal' of the Mitra Study course, you might like to re-read it and listen to the talks by Sangharakshita on which the module is based. These can be found on the Free Buddhist Audio website.

The following talks that are available on Free Buddhist Audio may also be helpful to listen to if you have time:

- Great Compassion Penetrates into the Marrow of the Bones (Dhammadinna 2009)
- The Buddha, The Bodhicitta and Sangharakshita (Vajratara 2015)

The Bodhicitta (taken from talks given at Tiratanaloka)

In one sense we could say we come on retreat in order to study this theme and get to know each other, but on a deeper level we could say we are here because of the Bodhicitta: to collectively create the conditions for the Bodhicitta to manifest amongst us and for that to continue and increase.

What is the Bodhicitta?

In the simplest sense, Sangharakshita translates the Bodhicitta as the 'Awakened heart or mind'. It is the arising of the Bodhicitta that creates the Bodhisattva, the being or even hero of Awakening. He defines the Bodhicitta not as a reified entity we can possess or own, but

as a *'non-egoistic stream of spiritual energy directed for the benefit of all beings'*¹ That non-egoistic stream of energy is directed, but there is no one who directs it. It transcends personal motivation.

Sangharakshita also calls it a myth *'an experience, a transcendental experience if you like, which cannot be adequately described in conceptual terms. The words myth or symbol suggest that the Bodhicitta is something which is emotionally moving, which stirs us on a much deeper level than that of the intellect or the ordinary waking consciousness. The term myth or symbol suggests something that has a definite impact on us, something that we necessarily experience, something that we cannot simply think about.'*² As an experience that emotionally moves us, rather than a set of ideas, the Bodhicitta as myth is something we can feel drawn towards. It is something that can give our lives a sense of meaning and purpose.

Q: How do you respond to the myth of the Bodhicitta? Does the myth of the Bodhicitta move or inspire you, or do you find it hard to connect with?

Q: What might that *'non-egoistic stream of energy'* look like manifested in the world? Have you got any examples, perhaps from your reading about Buddhist history or teachers of the past?

The Bodhicitta and The Order

The Bodhicitta is also the meaning and purpose of our Order and Movement. It is through the Bodhicitta that the Triratna Buddhist Order came into being, a subject which Subhuti brings out in his paper 'A Supra-Personal Force'. Sangharakshita himself did not consider that he was the best person to set up the Order and Movement, but he saw the necessity for a new Buddhist Movement and he responded to that need³. He said that *'there are times when, far from feeling that it was I who took on the responsibility, I feel it was the responsibility that took on me.'*⁴

Our Order and Movement came into being out of this non-egoistic stream of spiritual energy, and it is also a context for this stream of energy to manifest, continue and increase amongst us. One could also say that the Order's meaning and purpose is to enable that non-egoistic stream of spiritual energy to transform ourselves and the world. This is brought out in the lines of acceptance we recite in our Public Ordination ceremony: *'For the attainment of Enlightenment, with loyalty to my teachers, in harmony with friends and brethren and for the benefit of all beings, I accept this Ordination.'* These lines of acceptance echo the Buddha's own exhortation to his early disciples *'Go now and wander for the welfare and happiness of many, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, welfare and happiness of gods and men. Teach the Dhamma that is beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle and beautiful in the end, with the meaning and the letter. Explain a holy life that is utterly perfect and pure. There are beings with little dust on their eyes who will be lost through not hearing the Dhamma.'*⁵

Q: How do you respond to the idea of Order being founded by the Bodhicitta?

Q: How do you recognise that spiritual energy in your own life? How do you envision the meaning and purpose of your life?

The Order's relationship to the Bodhicitta is also reflected in the way that Sangharakshita has talked about the 1000 armed, 11 headed Avalokitesvara as a symbol of the Order. He originally talked about the Order being a '*faint reflection of Avalokitesvara*'⁶ and then stated that we shouldn't see this symbolically or metaphorically, but that the Order literally can become, even is, a Bodhisattva in the world working for the benefit of all beings.⁷

Having this perspective means the emphasis of the arising of the Bodhicitta shifts from an individual attainment to a collective practice. The more of us who help create the conditions for the Bodhicitta arising, the more likely it is to arise and the greater its influence will be. At the same time, we can see ourselves as part of the conditions for the the Bodhicitta to arise and our Dharma practice is an important part of the greater, collective, project.

Q: How do you imagine your own Dharma practice and activity as being part of a collective practice of Bodhicitta? What is your experience of collective practice?

The Bodhicitta in the context of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels

One of Sangharakshita's unique contributions to understanding the Bodhicitta is to see it as the other regarding dimension of Going For Refuge. What does this mean? Previously the Bodhicitta had been seen as a higher teaching, more advanced than the preliminary practice of Going For Refuge⁸. The Mahayana suggests two distinct paths with two goals: an individualistic path of liberation of the self (the Arahant), and an altruistic path of liberation for the sake of others (the Bodhisattva). Sangharakshita saw them not as different paths, but as dimensions of the same 'basic, crucial and unique spiritual experience'. There is no such thing as an individual Enlightenment and a liberation of self only. Within spiritual practice at every level there is an element of reaching out and expansion beyond self clinging. If there is not, the practice itself is not Going for Refuge.

This thinking characterises the nature of the Triratna Buddhist Order: other regarding activity is woven into our practice, it is part of who we are and why we do what we do. It is so deep we probably don't even notice it. Our main context for our other regarding activity is the Sangha. We practise strongly within the context of the Sangha at every level, for example in our teams for festivals, GfR groups, study, discussion and even meeting for coffee. We also engage in altruistic activity outside the Sangha, wherever we expand beyond self clinging. This is more effective if we undertake altruistic activity in teams that share our vision of altruism as a spiritual practice.

This is important because one of the main dangers of Buddhism is that it becomes what Sangharakshita labelled 'psuedo-spiritual aestheticism', where we refine the self rather than breaking through the self and other dichotomy. Buddhism can often be taken as a kind of therapy which can be useful as it does help us become happier and healthier. However, if we use Buddhism purely as a therapy, it loses its potential to effect society social and its radical edge. Unintentionally it may simply help us partake comfortably in society's status quo without challenging society⁹.

*'Without the idea of transforming world as well as self- our Going for Refuge is in danger of becoming an individualistic affair, and to that extent, in danger of being not truly a Going For Refuge at all.'*¹⁰

Q: What do you see as the challenges Buddhism faces in the modern world, particularly your own culture?

So we need a goal that is beyond a more refined 'me'. That goal also needs to be beautiful and attractive in itself. Subhuti draws this out in 'A Supra Personal Force': when we progressively leave behind our illusion of self, we are not left in a state progressively lacking in self, but *'selflessness has its own positive character'*. *'The Dharma life does indeed liberate one from the tyranny of self, with all its suffering. But one is liberated to an increasingly rich and subtle awareness from which compassionate activity spontaneously flows'*¹¹. The Bodhicitta is compelling and attractive, creative, rich and subtle, which is why Bodhisattva figures are depicted as beautiful and having many mysterious and dynamic qualities.

Q: Are there any Bodhisattva figures, archetypal or historical, you are particularly drawn to and why?

The Bodhicitta in the context of the Niyāmas

The teaching of the niyāmas brings out the Bodhicitta as an aspect of praṭītya samutpāda or conditioned arising. The niyāmas refer to the ways in which the universal principle of conditioned arising operates in different spheres or realms of existence. 'Niyāma' literally means law, regularity or rule¹².

In dedicating ourselves to the practice of skilful activity, or in this context we could say the paramitās (generosity, ethics, patience, energy, meditation and wisdom), we are initially working on the level of karma niyāma. In this way, we loosen self-clinging or our 'ego project'. Sangharakshita talks about the ego as a way of functioning rather than a thing in itself. If we function non-egoistically, we expand beyond our limitations, beyond the limitation of our self-clinging, which is a creative state of mind. When we engage with the concerns of others, as well as our own concerns, creatively, we expand our consciousness beyond the self and other duality, grasper and grasped. We all know how this feels:

*'In a reactive state you feel cold and hard as though there's a tight little ball inside you or as if you are constantly circling back on yourself. But in a creative state you feel free and open, flowing and expansive; instead of the little ball there is warmth, radiation, a spiralling outwards and upwards.'*¹³

This is what happens when we practise the paramitās. We are functioning in a non-egoistic way, expanding beyond the tight ball of self concern. When we feel expansive, something else can happen: it can leave room for a different type of experience to come in. The way the Buddha put it is that *'the clean cloth takes the dye.'*¹⁴ This different type of experience are the Dharma niyāma processes at work, or one could say, the Bodhicitta. In dependence upon skilful karma niyāma processes, Dharma niyāma processes arise. These are beyond our ordinary level of consciousness, but not separate from us. They arise in dependence upon the conscious work we have done. The way Sangharakshita explains it is that we *'begin to live simultaneously in the Transcendental and the mundane.'*¹⁵

The dharma niyāma processes are an ever present potentiality which we can open up to and align ourselves with, cooperate with, but not command. Although we can try and describe or understand these processes, they are essentially mysterious. We have glimpses, momentary experiences which somehow transcend our own ego identity. Sangharakshita talks about his own experiences of these processes, perhaps most vividly when he describes being in Nagpur after Dr Ambedkar's death. He says *'I felt that I was not a person, but an impersonal force'*¹⁶. This is, one could say, the Bodhicitta working through him.

Q: Can we describe any glimpses of this process in our own lives - either a sense of that expansive mode of being or the different type of experience that arises when we are in that expansive mode of being?

Q: Have we any examples from the lives of other people - within or outside the Buddhist tradition?

Seeing the Bodhicitta as part of pratīya samutpāda enables us to see that it is a natural experience arising dependent on certain conditions. *'Wonderful and unexpected though it is when it happens, the arising of the Bodhicitta is no accident. It is the most fundamental of Buddhist thought that whatever arises in the universe at any level does so not by chance, fate or the will of God, but in dependence upon natural - and in Buddhist terms even the supernatural is natural - causes and conditions.'*¹⁷

Q: How do we respond to the teaching that the Bodhicitta is a natural emergence in dependence on conditions? How possible do we think it is in our own lives?

How do we develop the Bodhicitta?

The main way to develop the Bodhicitta is just to get out of its way! It is our self-clinging that prevents us from experiencing the Dharma niyāma process. Whenever we construct a self, we also construct a non-self, an 'other'. This is the perceptual situation we usually experience: on the one hand everything I call 'myself' which is under my immediate control, and on the other everything and everyone that is independent of my control. Being attached to our sense of self in opposition to other leads us to defend and protect that self, wanting more and more of our experience under our control. When we no longer identify with the subjective content of our experience as 'myself' as opposed to 'other', even though the perceptual situation still occurs, *'the whole perceptual situation is expanded, clarified, illuminated'*¹⁸ We allow for a more spacious, expansive, beautiful and satisfying experience to emerge.

Altruism is important because it is a more expansive way of being; 'alter' means other. It is not about leaving ourselves out, but about taking others in. Perhaps it is inevitable given our tendency to polarise between self and other that we see the spiritual life in terms of *either* self *or* other, but the path of the Bodhicitta is to see the world in terms of self *and* other, and to act accordingly.

Sanghakshita explores the path of the Bodhicitta in terms of increasing the tension between our dedication to practise for ourselves and our dedication to help others so that we transcend the difference (see the extract called 'The Thought of Enlightenment'). We do this by working very strongly on our own practice (prajñā) and to help others (karuna) (see the extract called 'The Bi-tendential Value of Being'). This is an interesting way of exploring this area because generally speaking tension is regarded as something negative in our society and psychologically the answer seems to be to develop a better balance in our lives. Although we do need some balance in our lives, perhaps the spiritual solution is not simply to alternate periods on retreat with periods of outgoing altruistic activity, but to realise the essential non-duality of those two pulls or directions, even to intensify the practice of each. This doesn't have to be a harsh practice, it is more about having patience with these tensions, to see them as part of the process of spiritual transformation rather than something in our lives we have to sort out or fix.

Q: Where do you recognise this tension in your own life? How could you work with it?

Q: Do you tend more towards falling into 'horrified anxiety' - an over focus on helping others, or 'pseudo-spiritual aestheticism' - an over focus on your own practice?

Subhuti explores the path of the Bodhicitta in terms of three key elements: intensive Dharma practice, a Dharma lifestyle and serving the Dharma. These are the conditions that gave rise to the Bodhicitta in Sangharakshita's life and they are ways of exploring that tension between the self regarding and other regarding aspects of practice in our own

lives. Subhuti particularly emphasises serving the Dharma because we need something beyond and above ourselves to break through our self orientated structure of consciousness.

Q: Of these three elements, which area appeals to us most and which is the one we need to work on more effectively?

Q: What does the altruistic dimension of our practice look like?

I hope this gives us an introduction to the reading material regarding the Bodhicitta:

- It is an experience that involves our whole being, but is beyond our ordinary experience;
- It is something that emerges from not only personal action, but from intensive spiritual work with friends;
- It is the foundation and purpose of our Order and an integral part of Going for Refuge;
- As part of Dharma niyāma processes, it transcends our ordinary consciousness, but it emerges out of our ordinary practice of the karma niyāma;
- It is something mysterious and yet part of conditioned arising, so it feels beyond us, yet possible in our lives;
- The practice of Bodhicitta doesn't seek to make a balance between self concern and concern for others, but intensifies, in order to transcend, the conflict.

The Awakening of the Bodhi Heart, *extracted from the lecture*

Let us go back for a moment to the original Sanskrit term. And this is bodhicitta-utpada. Bodhi means of course, as we saw last week, 'spiritual Enlightenment', or 'spiritual awakening', which consists in the seeing of Reality face to face. Citta is one of these very ambiguous, multi-meaningful terms, which one encounters so often when one studies Buddhist Sanskrit. Citta means 'mind', it means 'thought', it means 'consciousness', it means also 'heart'; it means all of these things. Utpada means simply 'arising' or, if you like, more poetically, 'awakening'.

So this term, the bodhicitta-utpada, is one of the most important terms, we may say, in the whole field of Buddhism, certainly in the whole field of the Mahayana. And it is usually translated into English as 'the arising of the thought of Enlightenment', but let me say at once that this is exactly what it is not. In a sense you could hardly have a worse translation. It's not a thought about Enlightenment at all. We can think about Enlightenment as much as we like. We can read about it, think about it, talk about it. 'Enlightenment is both Wisdom and Compassion' the words come very glibly from our tongues, and we think we know all about Enlightenment. We are thinking about Enlightenment perhaps even now. We are thinking about Enlightenment. The thought about Enlightenment undoubtedly has arisen in our minds as we sit here, but the Bodhicitta has not arisen - we haven't become transformed, as we sit here, into Bodhisattvas. So the Bodhicitta is not just a thought of, a thought about Enlightenment, it's something very very much more than that indeed. Guenther translates it as 'Enlightened Attitude'. I personally sometimes translate it (I translated it like this in my recent 'Three Jewels') as the 'Will to Enlightenment'. And in the title of tonight's talk we speak of it as the 'Bodhi Heart'.

All these alternative translations - 'Enlightened attitude', 'will to Enlightenment', 'Bodhi Heart' - these are all considerably better than the 'thought of Enlightenment', but none of these renditions is really satisfactory. (This isn't altogether the fault of the English language. We may say it's the fault of language itself. We might even go so far as to say that 'Bodhicitta' is a very unsatisfactory term for the Bodhicitta.) The Bodhicitta is, in fact, not a mental state or activity, or function at all. It is certainly not a 'thought'. It's certainly not a thought which you or I can entertain. If we think of Enlightenment, that is not the Bodhicitta. It has nothing to do with thought. It is not even an 'act of will' I mean my personal will. It is not even 'being conscious', if by that I mean my being conscious or your being conscious of Enlightenment, or the fact that there is such a thing as 'Enlightenment'. The Bodhicitta is none of these things.

We may say that the Bodhicitta represents basically the manifestation, even the irruption, within us, of something transcendental. Something transcendental. In traditional terms - and I am thinking now of Nagarjuna's exposition of the Bodhicitta in a little work which he wrote on that subject - a very short but very profound work - in traditional terms the Bodhicitta is said to be not included in the 'Five Skandhas'. This is a very significant statement indeed, which gives us a tremendous clue to

the nature of the Bodhicitta. Its not being included in the Five Skandhas. And this statement of Nagarjuna, representing the best Mahayana tradition, requires a great deal of pondering.

The Bodhicitta is not included in the 'Five Skandhas', The Five Aggregates, the Five Heaps. So what does this mean? The 'Five Skandhas' comprise all that is phenomenal, all that is conditioned, all that is of this world. So when we say that the Bodhicitta is not included in the 'Five Skandhas', it means that it is something altogether out of this world, something transcendental. Certainly not a thought, certainly not a volition, but something out of this world, something, as I've said, transcendental. Not a thought, not an idea, not a concept, but - if we must use words at all - a profound, spiritual (read 'transcendental') experience: an experience which orients, which re- orients our whole existence, our entire being, our total nature.

Now not only is the Bodhicitta transcendental, but the Bodhicitta is not individual. This is another point that Nagarjuna makes, it's not individual. We speak of the Bodhicitta as arising in this person or that person, and one might then therefore think that there were in existence a number of Bodhicittas - there's your Bodhicitta and your Bodhicitta and my Bodhicitta - apparently a glorious plurality of Bodhicittas arising in different people, making them all Bodhisattvas. But in fact, it isn't so at all. Just as the Bodhicitta is not a thought of Enlightenment, in the same way, it's not an individual thing - it is not anybody's individually - so there is no plurality of Bodhicittas arising in different people just like ideas or thoughts, different ideas, different thoughts might arise in different people, even if they were thoughts of the same thing. Your thought of Enlightenment is your thought of Enlightenment, my thought of Enlightenment is my thought of Enlightenment; there are many thoughts. But your Bodhicitta is my Bodhicitta, and my Bodhicitta is your Bodhicitta; there is only one Bodhicitta.

The Bodhicitta is only one, and individuals in whom the Bodhicitta is said to have arisen participate in that one Bodhicitta, or manifest that one Bodhicitta, in varying degrees. And of course the Mahayana writers bring in that old Buddhist illustration or simile that tells us that the Bodhicitta is like the moon reflected, as it were, in different people, arisen in different people, just as the moon is reflected variously in different bodies of water. There are many reflections, but one moon. In the same way, many manifestations, but one Bodhicitta.

Now, though we've used the expression 'reflection', which is a bit static, we are not to think of the Bodhicitta in purely static terms. What is known in the Mahayana tradition as the 'Absolute Bodhicitta' - the Bodhicitta in its Absolute aspect, outside space and time - this Absolute Bodhicitta is identical with Reality itself. And being identical with Reality, the Absolute Bodhicitta is as such beyond change, or rather, we may say, is beyond the opposition between change and non-change. But this doesn't hold good of what is known to the tradition as the 'relative Bodhicitta'. The relative Bodhicitta is, as it were, an active force, an active force at work. And this is why, as I said a little while ago, I prefer, personally, if I have to translate the term 'Bodhicitta', to speak of it as the 'Will to Enlightenment' (bearing in mind that one is speaking of the relative, as distinct from the

Absolute, Bodhicitta). The Will to Enlightenment. But this Will to Enlightenment is not an act of will of any individual. The Bodhicitta is not something which I will. Just as it is not my thought, it's not my will. The Bodhicitta is no more an act of anybody's individual will than it is anybody's individual thought. We might, in fact - though here we have rather to grope for words - think of the Bodhicitta as a sort of 'Cosmic will'. (I don't quite like to use this word 'will', but there's really no other.) A sort of cosmic will. If you like a will at work in the world, at work in the universe, in the direction of what we can only think of as universal redemption: the liberation, the Enlightenment, ultimately, of all sentient beings.

We may even think of the Bodhicitta as a sort of 'spirit of Enlightenment', immanent in the world, and leading individuals to higher and ever higher degrees of spiritual perfection. So, this being the case, it is clear that individuals do not possess the Bodhicitta. If you possess it, it's not the Bodhicitta (it's something else; it's your own thought, it's your own idea); but the Bodhicitta - the transcendental, non-individual, cosmic Bodhicitta - you've missed, you've got hold of something else. Individuals do not possess the Bodhicitta. We may say that it is the Bodhicitta that possesses individuals. And those of whom the Bodhicitta 'takes possession', as it were, in whom this Bodhicitta arises, or within whom it manifests, become what we call 'Bodhisattvas'. They live, that is to say, for the sake of Enlightenment; they strive to actualize, for the benefit of all, the highest potentialities that the universe contains.

The Triratna Buddhist Community and the Stream of the Dharma, *extracted*
from 'A Supra-Personal Force' Paper

The crux of the Dharma life is the transition from the mundane to the transcendental path – from the *laukika* to the *lokottara mārga*. Before that transition takes place, one is a *prthagjana*, 'a common worldling', dominated by the illusion that one has an independent and ultimately substantial self-identity. On the basis of this identity, one craves whatever appears to provide greater happiness and security and one hates whatever threatens or causes pain. Whatever experiences tend to reveal the impermanence even of that self-identity are ignored or controverted.

Once one enters upon the transcendental path, one becomes an *ārya*, one in whom this illusion of an ultimately real selfhood has been broken, if not yet entirely eradicated. Although the self-oriented motivations of greed, hatred, and delusion continue to arise, they can no longer dominate one's actions and are progressively eradicated as the path is traversed.

The transition from *prthagjana* to *ārya* is then, most essentially, a movement from a consciousness dominated by the illusion of an ultimately real self to one that has no such illusion – or at least increasingly less of one. This marks a difference in the motive force or power that fuels progress on the path of the Dharma. As a *prthagjana*, following the mundane path, the most important factor is the power of karma. One consciously subordinates one's ego identity to ethical and spiritual principles, recognising them as serving one's own best interests. In effect, one uses self-interest to slowly transcend selfishness, in accordance with karmic conditionality. On the basis of skilful action, mental states arise in which the element of self-clinging is progressively attenuated, eventually enabling one to see through its illusory and painful character.

With that realisation, one enters upon the transcendental path, thereby becoming an *ārya*, in whom selfish motivations have ceased to be the chief drivers of action. Instead of self-interested desires, however positive, a stream of non-egoic volitions now arise. This flow of selfless impulses is no longer fuelled by the karmic kind of conditionality, but by processes arising under the heading of the *Dharma-niyāma*.

So much are our minds dominated by self-interest that it is quite difficult to imagine what that truly selfless mind might be like. Nonetheless, this is the Dharma's central claim: that it is possible to act, and act consistently, from a basis other than selfishness. This is what we are trying to achieve through our Dharma practice.

Urgyen Sangharakshita himself describes, very beautifully and simply, an experience that seems to be of this kind. Writing to his friend Dinoo Dubash, on 15 December 1956, he tells of his visit to Nagpur in Central India a few days earlier, which had coincided with the tragic news of the death of Dr Ambedkar, the great Indian leader who just seven weeks before had led hundreds of thousands of his followers out of Untouchability into Buddhism in that very city. Once the shocking tidings

had become known, waves of grief and despair had rolled through the multitudes of new Buddhists and it had fallen especially to Sangharakshita to try to rally them through meeting after meeting, talk after talk, often continuing late into the night. That story is relatively well known. However, what is of note here is the very unassuming, almost understated, account he gives of his own inner experience in his letter to his friend, written just a week later:

'My own spiritual experience during this period was most peculiar. I felt that I was not a person but an impersonal force. At one stage I was working quite literally without any thought, just as one is in samādhi. Also I felt hardly any tiredness – certainly not at all what one would have expected from such a tremendous strain. When I left Nagpur I felt quite refreshed and rested.'

'An impersonal force'! It is safe to assume that what he means by this is that he was not motivated by self at all. No 'personal' interest drove him, but he nonetheless acted, and acted very effectively, giving people just what they needed.

Bodhisattvas and Arhats

The crucial transition in Dharma life is, then, a movement from a self-oriented to a selfless motivation. 'Selfless', of course, does not mean merely lacking in self: a kind of blank automaton. Selflessness has its own positive character, although not in terms easy for us to grasp. It seems that to the degree that one is selfless one responds spontaneously to the needs of whatever situation one finds oneself in, in a way that for the *prthagjana* may seem quite mysterious. We might describe the motive for such action as compassion, but that could be rather misleading. If it is compassion at all, it is quite different from the kindly concerns that we ourselves might feel. It has little or no trace of sentiment or pity: indeed, it is not truly an emotion at all. It is not even the positive extension of our own self-concern to include others, which is what we are cultivating in the mundane practice of *maitrī-* or *karuṇā-bhāvanā*. It is rather a function of a fully mature awareness: a need is seen and responded to in the most appropriate way without any personal interest, simply as one might, without a moment's premeditation, pick up for someone something dropped from their pocket, spontaneously responding to what is objectively needed.

The early tradition, especially as found in the Pali Nikayas, speaks of this transition in terms of Stream Entry. It does not, however, stress its compassionate character, rather dwelling on the breaking of the illusion of a permanent self and the freedom and ease that that brings. The life of the Buddha himself is clearly one of compassionate action and there is much incidental material that stresses the importance, for instance, of *maitrī*. Later traditions, which eventually found expression in what is loosely characterised as the 'Mahayana', did wish to emphasise the compassionate nature of the Buddha, but did so by setting him apart from his own historical disciples and positing a separate path for those who chose to take him as their ideal. Such bodhisattvas were said to be motivated to become buddhas themselves for the benefit of all beings by the power of bodhicitta, which indeed is a term for a motivating force that is selfless – albeit, short of bodhi itself, still admixed with decreasing traces of self-clinging.

It appeared then to these later traditions that there were at least two kinds of Dharma goal: Arhatship, liberation attained for self alone without compassion, and Buddhahood, full and perfect enlightenment gained by means of the compassionate path of the bodhisattva. This however creates a problem. If this were indeed a valid distinction, it would require a selflessness that was not compassionate: the Stream Entrant would be someone who had decisively broken self-attachment but had no other motivations to replace egoistic desire: a blank automaton indeed. In my recent conversations with Urgyen Sangharakshita, he has stressed again that he does not consider that there are two separate paths and goals. He suggests that we can discard the traditional Mahayana distinction as erroneous and see Entering the Stream of the Dharma as essentially the same as the Arising of Bodhicitta – even if this is not the way it is understood traditionally. When you Enter the Stream, the selfless motivations of bodhicitta arise. On this basis we can appreciate that the Arising of Bodhicitta and Entering the Stream are simply Real Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels considered under the aspects of altruism and of inner transformation.

We can then see the relationship between various key terms. The **Dharma** is, in its most important meaning, the way things truly are as a dynamic cosmic principle; the *Dharma-niyāma* is the kind of conditionality that comes into play when one sees the Dharma directly for oneself, especially by breaking free of the illusion of a separate selfhood; the **Stream of the Dharma** is that flow of Dharmic conditionality conceived as a spontaneous non-egoic force that carries one who has decisively broken the self illusion further and further into selflessness; the person who enters that stream is a **Stream Entrant**; **Bodhicitta** refers to the flow of ever-increasingly selfless mental states that arise in dependence on the Dharmic kind of conditionality; the **Bodhisattva** is one in whom bodhicitta has become the dominant force and who therefore responds selflessly to the deepest needs of others. **Insight** or *vipaśyanā* marks entry into the Stream of the Dharma and also, in this revised schema, bodhicitta becoming **Irreversible** – although, of course, the way this and other terms from the bodhisattva path are used here does not correspond in some important respects to their usages in developed Mahayana since the different systems of thought have evolved in different circumstances and cannot be correlated in an entirely satisfactory or consistent way.

It should be noted here that the term 'bodhicitta' – particularly when referred to as 'The Bodhicitta' – is a metaphor that is easily reified to imply an enduring metaphysical entity, existing independently of the individual within whom it arises, and thus similar to the '*ātman*' of Brahminical thought that the Buddha so explicitly and centrally denied. Indeed one often hears the term 'The Bodhicitta' used naively in that way by Buddhists, even within the Triratna Community. However, used carefully and correctly, it implies a dynamic process, referring to the stream of selfless mental states that arise on the basis of the Dharmic kind of conditionality, and is thus far from being an eternal metaphysical entity. It is now so widely used and carries such deep Dharmic significance for so many that it can hardly be eschewed. Its usefulness can be found in its emphasis on the altruistic character of those selfless states and on their 'non-personal' character: on their having nothing to do with egoistic volition. It does nonetheless need to be used with considerable care, with full consciousness of the dangers of metaphysical reification. I would suggest it should never be employed without close juxtaposition to more dynamic language that explicitly connects it with the principle of dependent arising.

We are left then with a picture that brings together the material found in the Pali and other early canons with the spiritual riches of the Mahayana perspective. The Dharma life does indeed liberate one *from* the tyranny of self, with all its suffering. But one is liberated *to* an increasingly rich and subtle awareness from which compassionate activity spontaneously flows. The Buddha's motivation was no different from that of his enlightened disciples, although clearly his human genius went far beyond theirs. Indeed, the preoccupation with the Buddha's special 'cosmic' function seems to have emerged somewhat after his time. Critical study of the Pali canon suggests that the early focus of the Buddha's teaching was simply on moving into the flow of the Dharma, that progression of non-egoic states proceeding according to the Dharmic kind of conditionality.

It is in this sense that we can speak of bodhisattvas and bodhicitta in the same breath as Arhats and Stream Entry; although we will need to be aware that we are combining these terms in a different way from that found in tradition – otherwise, we can appear to be rather simplistically conflating two different universes of discourse. This can especially cause complications when we are reading traditional texts or find ourselves in dialogue with Buddhists from traditional schools.

No doubt we are best advised to avoid getting caught up in this historical complexity as much as possible, especially by referring to the two key *niyāmas* for the Dharma life: the karmic and the Dharmic. In the end, we must come down to the practicality of transforming ourselves through skilful karma so that we can decisively break through the illusion of a fixed self and let the spontaneous 'impersonal force' of the Dharma motivate us to respond to the objective needs around us. We need not concern ourselves with where that will lead us, for that is not a matter under the control of egoic volition. In other words, we simply need to get on with working with the karmic and Dharmic levels of conditionality. Of course, this is to be done through steadily working in a balanced way on integration, positive emotion, spiritual receptivity, spiritual death, and spiritual rebirth.

It seems to me of the greatest significance for his disciples that Sangharakshita considers that the Order and movement were not founded by him alone but by non-egoic forces, functioning according to the Dharmic kind of conditionality. However, there is plenty of room for misunderstanding. If one takes the metaphor too literally one thinks of some divine being or cosmic energy 'channelled', so to speak, by Sangharakshita and others: the energy being one thing, Sangharakshita another. But this does not at all do justice to what is being communicated and we must look further at what Sangharakshita himself has had to say about his experience in this respect.

It should go without saying that, in discussing these experiences, Sangharakshita is not at all making antinomian claims, either for himself or for the Order. Indeed, the very reverse. One senses that Sangharakshita says these things in all humility, as a disclaimer rather than a claim. The fact that it was as though the Order was founded through him by forces that transcend him as a mere person does not imply that he is perfect and that all his actions are by definition beyond appraisal.

Far less does it suggest that Order members are always motivated by trans-egoic inspiration or that the Order collectively is always necessarily a bodhisattva Sangha. All too obviously, that is not the case. However, it is of the greatest significance that it was founded, in Sangharakshita's own estimation, by what he can best describe as something like a supra-personal energy or force or even consciousness working through him, however much its members may fail to live up to that initial momentum. It was founded, in other words, by processes conditioned according to the *Dharma-niyāma*, by 'bodhicitta' – indeed, therefore, by the Dharma.

Not only could we say that those forces gave the Order birth, their cultivation and service is its meaning and purpose. Individual Order members can work on themselves by their participation in the Order, so that they enter the Stream of the Dharma, thereby unleashing non-egoic motivations, arising according to the Dharmic kind of conditionality – motivations that may to them appear as if they are a supra-personal force or energy working through them – even a supra-personal consciousness or bodhisattva. In the service of that creative energy and under its guidance, they can then, each and every one, together allow the Dharma to transform the world. This is why the Order exists.

Processes arising according to the Dharmic kind of conditionality founded the Order, so Sangharakshita in effect says, and the Order's meaning and purpose is to enable those processes to transform the world by the efforts we make, individually and yet collectively, to enter the Stream of the Dharma. For all our many failings, I am myself completely confident that the Order does embody, to a greater or lesser extent, those processes. There are among us enough who do genuinely try to serve the Dharma as a living force by letting it work through them, and individuals and institutions in general are sufficiently attuned through *kalyana mitrata* to such sufficiently inspired and consistent individuals, for the Triratna Community as a whole to embody to some degree the spirit of the eleven-headed and thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara – and to embody it quite literally.

The Thought of Enlightenment, *extracted from 'Survey of Buddhism' 4.4*

As a spark leaps up when two electrically charged terminals are brought in contact, so the Thought of Enlightenment arises not from theoretical considerations but from the conjunction in the spiritual life of the devotee of two quite different, seemingly divergent, trends of thought and emotion. The art of producing the Thought of Enlightenment consists in so stimulating these two trends that the mounting tension between them ultimately causes them to coalesce at a higher level of spiritual awareness. The product of this coalescence, the synthesis which emerges from the conflict of thesis and antithesis, in experience, is the Thought of Enlightenment.

The first trend corresponds to the ordinary dualistic conception of the religious life as the abandonment of the mundane and the attainment of the Transcendental by one person, or in other words to the Path of the Disciple or the Path of the Private Buddha... In short the devotee intensifies his aspiration to the Transcendental by means of systematic reflection on the unsatisfactoriness of the mundane.

The second trend of the thought and emotion corresponds to the humanitarian sentiment in general, and to the feeling of pity in particular. It is to be stimulated by contemplating the now tragic, now sordid, spectacle of the sins and sufferings of ordinary infatuated men and women... Here the devotee reflects on the evils of mundane existence not with a view to developing aversion but in order to intensify pity. Formerly he was concerned with suffering only to the extent that it affected, or might affect, him personally; now he is concerned with it in so far as it affects all sentient beings. Whereas the first kind of reflection sets up a movement of repulsion from the mundane and attraction towards the Transcendental, the second sets up its contrary, a movement of repulsion from the Transcendental, conceived as merely transcendental, and of attraction towards - not the mundane itself, but - the sentient beings who are subject to birth, old age, disease and death in the mundane: one is intellectual and egoistic, in the line of Wisdom; the other emotional and altruistic, in the line of Compassion. The two trends being absolute contraries, the devotee is pulled now in this direction, now in that; or rather, he is wrenched in both directions simultaneously.

But in the Dharmakāya, Wisdom and Compassion, far from being contraries, are inseparable, the static and dynamic aspects of one Supreme Reality. That thought in which the devotee, rising for an instant to the level of the Dharmakāya, for the first time brings together, not by way of merely external juxtaposition, but by the realization of their essential non-duality, the trend of Wisdom and the trend of Compassion, is termed the Thought of Enlightenment.

But though the Thought of Enlightenment is produced by the fusion of these two trends, so greatly does Wisdom and Compassion as one reality differ from Wisdom and Compassion as independent realities, that between the Thought of Enlightenment and its supposed components there seems to

be an absolute discontinuity. Śāntideva therefore compares the production of the Thought of Enlightenment to the finding of a jewel on a dunghill by a blind man! Yet when he desires to give expression to the Thought of Enlightenment, the devotee - or Bodhisattva, as he may now be called - cannot do otherwise than treat it as continuous with Wisdom and Compassion and speak of it as though it were simply a combination or conjunction of these two trends.

From now onwards the Bodhisattva aims at a Goal in which Wisdom and Compassion are not separate realities, and in which the attainment of Enlightenment and the promotion of the welfare of all sentient beings are no longer irreconcilable ideals. He begins to live simultaneously in the Transcendental and the mundane.

Bi-tendential Value of Being, *extracted from 'Mind in Buddhist Psychology'*
Seminar, Padmaloka 1976

I was thinking about that phrase of Guenther's: I don't know what Sanskrit or Tibetan term it translates, but it's what he calls, or something that he calls, Bi-tendential value of Being, with a capital B. What do you think he means by that?

Q: Going two ways?

S: Yes, that's pretty good, going two ways.

Q: Wisdom and Compassion?

S: Yes, right, wisdom and compassion. That is, or rather those are, the Bi-tendential value of Being. How exactly do they come in? It's as though the psychological has reference to oneself, the ethical to another; not that the two are completely exclusive because you also come into the picture when there is a reference to another. But why is it even that we think and speak in terms of self and other, subject and object? It's because of this basic and original, so far as ordinary experience goes, irreducible dichotomy of self and other, of subject and object. It's within this framework, within the framework of this dichotomy that the whole of our experience and the whole of our thought takes place. But according to Buddhist thought, according to Buddhist philosophy for want of a better term, especially according to the Mahayana philosophy, there is what Guenther calls Being. In the realm of Ultimate Reality there is no subject/object division. I think that is commonly or generally understood.

It's as though on the level of empirical reality, on the level of ordinary experience, you need a double approach. Reality has bifurcated into subject and object, so you are to approach Reality not only via the subject, but via the object. In fact, the best way to approach the bi-tendential Reality is via the object rather than via the subject, because to do things via the subject is your natural one-sided tendency. Even if you approach what you consider to be Being, it is still just you approaching - the approach still takes place within the basic subject/object dichotomy: you are still doing something for yourself, which is a contradiction in terms. So therefore the altruistic approach is as necessary as the self-regarding approach. You are making a two-pronged attack on Being. You have to gain Being not only for yourself, but for others, otherwise 'you' do not gain Being at all, because 'you' cannot. It is only you plus others who can. So when you plus others attain Being, that is the bi-tendential value of Being which has been realized: *prajñā* representing 'your' attainment, and *karuṇā* representing 'their' attainment. If you approach the non-dual Being from the standpoint of subject your experience culminates in *prajñā*. If you approach from the standpoint of other, your experience culminates in *karuṇā*. And these two coalesce: they form one value of Ultimate Reality; hence the bi-tendential value of Being.

To put it very simply and practically, it is not enough to just sit there in your meditation feeling all nice and unselfish. You've actually got to go out and act unselfishly, which brings in the ethical, the other-orientated dimension. It is that only which will break down the barrier between subject and object. This is why Śāntideva speaks in terms of the exchange between self and the other. You have to treat the other as the self, because what is the difference between them? You quite literally cannot realize Being by yourself: that isn't even a possibility. That is what the Bodhisattva sees when he 'gives up' the idea of individual Nirvana. There is no Nirvana for 'me' as distinct from Nirvana for 'them'.

Q: And there's no possibility of going it alone?

S: No. No.

Q: Or going on your six month solitary retreat and realizing Being?

S: A solitary retreat can certainly help you in the direction of Being, but not if you think that you are doing it just for the sake of yourself; hence the dedication of merits at the end of every spiritual act. If we think in terms of doing it all for my sake, my development, my spiritual life, we are not really breaking down that basic dichotomy between subject and object, which is all that really stands in our way. We are just refining and refining one side of the dichotomy. So this is what the Bodhisattva Ideal is all about. If we are not careful, if we give too much value to what I call the psychological and not enough to the ethical, or the other-regarding, the spiritual life becomes a sort of refined experience just for your own sake. You might even become resentful of other people intervening and interfering with your enjoyment of, or devotion to, these refined experiences.

Q: Where will that eventually lead that parson?

S: It doesn't lead anywhere, except to this increasingly refined pseudo-spiritual aestheticism. I think that we have to be really careful about this. This is why the objective, other-regarding aspect of work and activity is so good for people. Even if you don't like doing it particularly, well, never mind!

Q: Putting that in the context of study, perhaps you should study only to help other people to give other people the value of what you have learned?

S: Yes, one could say that. But yourself *and* others. The Bodhisattva Ideal always has to do with self *and* others. You don't altogether leave yourself out, because you are also a person, a sentient being. So self *and* others. That is how we experience things anyway, so all right; it's honest to speak in these sorts of terms. Whatever you do, do it for the sake of self and others.

Study area 2. Spiritual Friendship and the Third Order of Consciousness

Summary and Reading

The second topic we will be studying on this retreat is Sangharakshita's teaching on spiritual friendship and what he calls 'the third order of consciousness'.

The information below is a summary of the main points taken from talks given by the team at Tiratanaloka as well as extracts from seminars, talks and papers written by Sangharakshita and Subhuti. It provides a summary of the main areas we'll be looking at, as well as some questions we'd like you to consider.

Required reading

The main text, as before, is Subhuti's paper '**A Supra-Personal Force**'.

Optional study material

There is an essay called 'The Good Friend' in Sangharakshita's book 'Crossing the Stream'. This is available to download for free at www.sangharakshita.org

Both Subhuti and Maitreyabandhu have written books on spiritual friendship that you might be interested in. They are called 'Buddhism and Friendship' and 'Thicker than Blood' respectively.

If you prefer talks, the following talks available on Free Buddhist Audio may also be helpful to listen to:

- The Meaning of Friendship in Buddhism (Sangharakshita 1992)
- How to be a Friend (Vajratara 2011)

Spiritual Friendship and the Third Order of Consciousness (a summary taken from talks given at Tiratanaloka)

In the last section we looked at how the Bodhicitta arises on the basis of expanding beyond our narrow self concern, responding to the welfare of others as well as ourselves. The main forum where we practise this is in our personal relationships with the people we are close to: with our friends. Gampopa, when talking about Bodhicitta practice said:

'At the beginning of our spiritual career it is impossible to be in touch with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, we have to meet with ordinary human beings as spiritual friends... so our greatest benefactor in the early stages of our spiritual life are our ordinary human relationships'.¹⁹

So it is important to see the altruistic dimension of Going for Refuge as our everyday interactions with the people we know, not only as helping strangers in need.

It is spiritual friendship, Sangharakshita says, that takes our practice of 'anatman' or 'no fixed and separate selfhood' from an intellectual to an emotional plane²⁰. Because we care for our friends, we feel moved to respond to their needs and desires, even sometimes at the expense of our own. He says we could see our practice of spiritual friendship as a practice of higher and higher levels of selflessness, starting with simple acts of kindness, helpfulness and generosity and eventually becoming a Bodhisattva prepared to give whatever we can for the welfare of our friend and aiding their Enlightenment.

*'The good friend becomes by insensible degrees the trusted counsellor, the trusted counsellor the spiritual guide or guru, the guru the Bodhisattva, and the Bodhisattva the Buddha, just as among the colours of the rainbow red merges imperceptibly into orange, orange into yellow, yellow into green and so on.'*²¹

Q: Why is the Bodhicitta more likely to arise within friendship?

Q: How do you practise 'selflessness' with Sangha friends and non-Sangha friends? Is there a difference?

Duties of Friendship

'Duties' may not be a popular word, but, Sangharakshita explains, *'The performance of one's duty does not mean merely the grudging recognition and half hearted rendering of what is legally or even morally due to one's family and friends..., but in the unobstructed outward flow of one's love and compassion over the whole world.'*²² He draws attention to the fact that it is better to consider friendship in terms of what we can offer, as being a friend rather than having a friend. This, he says, results in the *'gradual loosening of the bonds of selfishness and egotism'*. Our duties of friendship are the *'sweet child of the realisation of emptiness - Śūnyatā - within the depths of our own heart'*.²³

Q: How can we explore duty as coming from śūnyatā in our own practice of friendship?

What are the duties of friendship, or in other words, how can we be a good friend? The Buddha talks about the duties of friendship as the samgrahavastus or 'means of unification': generosity (dāna), kindly speech (piyavādītā), beneficial help (arthacaryā) and exemplification (samānāṛthata); as well as keeping one's word.²⁴

Dāna: in our practice of friendship, dāna primarily means expressing our special awareness of our friend and our genuine concern and positive feeling towards them in acts of generosity. Sangharaskhita has said *'we could say a spiritual community is characterised by the giving of gifts'*²⁵ and encourages us to be generous with our time, money and energy. However, it is not just a sharing of things, but a sharing of ourselves:

our thoughts, feelings, hopes, and fears. Some times this can feel like quite a risk, and it is important to share appropriately in a forum where the sharing can be mutual, for example in a Going for Refuge group.

Q: How easy do we find it to share with our friends? What might hold us back? How could we share ourselves more deeply?

Priyavādita: kindly speech is also called affectionate speech, speaking to people in an emotionally positive manner. Sangharakshita says that this is *‘the rule within the spiritual community, the rule among those who are engaged in Building the Buddhaland’*²⁶. It is the verbal expression of positive emotion and at its best it is expression of spiritual insight: *‘the expression of delighted awareness of people’s spiritual potential’*²⁷ From that point of view we can experience it as the way we speak to our friend when we speak from our depths, from the places we touch even in silence: that gap between our thoughts and immediate expression. If we speak from that place, we speak from a place of meaning and deeper feeling. We delight in the awareness of our friend’s potential.

Q: Are we ever afraid of expressing our positive emotion towards our friends? If so, why?

Arthacaryā: artha also means what is meaningful, so arthacaryā can be translated as not only beneficial, but meaningful activity. We do whatever we can to help our friends grow. Sometimes we can assume we know what is best for our friend when in reality we find it hard to even know what is best for ourselves! So this samgrahavastu requires a certain amount of wisdom and appropriateness, listening to what our friend needs. Spiritual friendship is a translation of kalyāna mitrata, and kalyāna literally means ‘beautiful, charming, auspicious, helpful, morally good’ and is derived from the root kal which means ‘to impel, incite, urge on.’ The main way we urge our friend on is by inspiring them with our own inspiration, sharing the beauty of our own spiritual life, not telling them what they should do.

Q: How do we share our inspiration with our friends?

Samānārhata means exemplification, but it also means treating others like oneself. We could interpret this as embodying our practice and our vision in our behaviour. It requires us to be aware of what we think and feel and communicate from that basis, being honest about who we are and where we are at. This is a difficult practice as it requires a level of integration and awareness, but it is also very satisfying. If we can communicate to our friend in ‘good times and bad’, they become able to communicate to us their real and honest feelings and our friendship develops a strength which can withstand the vicissitudes of life. We rejoice in each other’s good fortune, and we are sympathetic to each other in times when we are struggling.

Q: Have you had an experience when you were able to take a risk in being honest with your friend? What were the effects?

The Living Practice of Friendship

We may find a friendship quite easy at first, but if we carry on developing a relationship with the other person, we will come up against moments when differences and difficulties arise. How do we steer through this tension, which is essentially the tension between self and other? It is important that we see these times not as a failure or that we are doing something wrong, but more as part of the practice of friendship itself. How else will we get to know ourselves and our friend, and how else will we transcend the dichotomy between self and other? Sangharakshita talks about communication within friendship as *'mutual responsiveness across a chasm'*²⁸- sometimes there is a journey to make, and that requires knowing ourselves and our own ways of separating ourselves from others, as well as making the effort to empathise with our friend.

This is not an easy area and it is easy to fall back into old patterns. We have a choice: do we deny our own needs, do we stick with our own needs and deny the needs of our friend; do we come to a superficial compromise where neither person's needs are met and the underlying issue isn't resolved, or do we fully commit to open communication?

Q: What are our patterns in friendship?

Q: How do we work with tensions between ourselves and others? What could be a working ground for us in this area?

The Potential of Friendship

The following extracts explore the potential of friendship, a potential which is a key aspect of Sangharakshita's teaching and perhaps one of his unique contributions to modern Buddhism. In the last section we saw how intensive spiritual practice on the level of karma niyāma enables the Dharma niyāma processes to emerge. When we practise spiritual friendship, it is not only through our own intensive spiritual practice, but through a shared mutual practice of friendship that we become receptive to the Dharma niyāma processes. In this case we experience a level of consciousness that goes beyond individual consciousness, and yet is not a suppression of individuality. It is a different order of consciousness, which Sangharakshita called 'the third order of consciousness'. The third order of consciousness is more than group consciousness and more than the consciousness of a true individual, it is the consciousness that arises when individuals come together on the basis of shared values. A consciousness arises that is greater than the sum of its parts. *'In the process of communication and Going for Refuge to the Sangha, a dimension is eventually reached in which distinctions between the people involved no longer have any meaning - such distinctions have been transcended'*²⁹. This is the Bodhicitta looked at from another angle: *'a higher unity than even the spiritual community'*.

Another term that describes a similar process is the 'Sanghakaya', a term that emerged during the 2013 International Convention at Bodhgaya, but is hinted at in Sangharakshita's seminar on 'The Precious Garland'. Sanghakaya means a 'body of Sangha' and indicates a spiritual reality that arises on the basis of harmonious communication by the spiritually committed or true individuals. It can provide for us a 'transcendental object': something beyond us that we're strongly attracted to, that takes us beyond the self and other dichotomy, but in which we can also participate. The Buddha himself revered the Sangha in this sense 'once the Sangha attained to greatness'³⁰.

Bringing the Sanghakaya into being requires intensive interaction between spiritual friends who are committed to common ideals and principles and the realisation of those ideals in the world. For Order Members this means engaging intensively in the life of the Order in whatever way possible. When that happens, something else emerges which has the flavour of the Sanghakaya, third order of consciousness or even bodhicitta.

Q: How do you keep alive in your every day experience a sense that you are participating in the spiritual community with a shared service of the Dharma? What experiences of co-operation have you had in the sangha?

The Bodhicitta Arising within the Collective, *extract from 'Q & A Bodhisattva Ideal', Tuscany 1984*

Q: I think that you said that the Bodhicitta is more likely to arise collectively within a Spiritual community: why is this, and how would this manifest?

S: Well, we've already seen that one can regard Stream Entry and the Bodhicitta as different aspects of the same experience. So if one says that the Bodhicitta is more likely to arise within the spiritual community, I think one also has to say that one is more likely to attain Stream Entry within the Spiritual Community. So why is that? I think the reason is pretty obvious, because a spiritual community represents a situation of intense mutual spiritual friendship wherein you encourage one another in your efforts. So if you have a situation in which you are all encouraging one another in your spiritual efforts as on, say, or as in a spiritual community, you're much more likely to achieve that sort of breakthrough, whether in terms of Stream Entry, or in terms of the arising of the Bodhicitta, than if you were simply on your own. This is not to say that you can't do it on your own, and certainly many people have done it on their own: but I think for the majority of people the spiritual community is a much more favourable context for that sort of experience.

I must say, though, that, speaking in terms of the Bodhicitta, I was going somewhat further than that even, in a way that isn't quite applicable in connection with Stream Entry. I spoke of the Bodhicitta as representing the idea of working for the salvation or emancipation of all beings, but at the same time realising that there were no beings to be saved or emancipated. So in much the same way, what one is trying to do is to suggest something which is, as it were, supra-individual, but which is not collective - and this is very, very difficult.

It's as though you've got a number of stages: you've got first of all the sub-individual, that's stage one, where there's no individuality, where there is as it were only membership of the species, membership of the group. Then you've got a second level, you might say an intermediate level where you have got the individual: perhaps in opposition to the group. Sometimes two kinds of individual are distinguished here: the individual as dominated by the group, and the individual as dominating the group. But then there's another stage still, a third stage, where the individual as it were stands free from the group altogether, and is just an individual. But then, beyond that, you've got another stage where the individual enters into free association with other individuals, and this is what we call the spiritual community. And time and again, of course, we've insisted that this is not the same as a group: a free association of real individuals is not a group, it's a spiritual community. It's a Sangha. But you can envisage something even beyond that - we don't have any word, even, for that - we don't have a word, even, for spiritual community: but if you can envisage what happens as a result of the intensive interaction of individuals, real individuals, one might say even transcendental individuals, well, what results, one might say, is the Bodhicitta³¹.

It's not an individual thing, in the same way that the individual is an individual - it's another level beyond that. At the same time it isn't something collective which all those individuals possess in

common. I think some of the language that I've used in this particular lecture might give that impression, but that was not my intention.

So one has got really these four different levels. But one speaks of the arising of the Bodhicitta rather than of stream entry because the Bodhicitta, perhaps for more historical reasons, has this other-regarding reference which stream-entry doesn't. Stream entry has, so to speak, a self-regarding reference, even though in the case of Stream Entry there's no self, just as in the case of the Bodhicitta, there are no others, in an ultimate physical sense.

But of course one is not to take this expression, 'within the spiritual community' too literally - not that within this particular closed circle of people. What it is really trying to convey is that it is another level of development beyond even individuality, perhaps even transcendental individuality, as we usually understand it. The spiritual community is not necessarily that which is located in a particular place occupying certain physical bodies.

Just as you could be on your own, you could be on solitary retreat, but in a sense you could be in contact with other members of the spiritual community, in the sense that you would be very aware of them, and they would be aware of you. One mustn't think too much in terms of actual physical contact, though obviously one has to do so at first, and one certainly shouldn't use the fact that you are, or are supposed to be, in contact on another level as an excuse for neglecting contact on the level on which you are actually operative. But nonetheless it is the... well, in a sense the non-physical contact which is important - even though that is mediated through the physical body, because we are identified, or we identify ourselves, with the physical body to such an extent.

One could say it is a question of a higher level of consciousness, or experience, arising in the sense of a number of individuals, that is to say, real individuals, especially what I've called transcendental individuals, then, in dependence upon those individuals taken as it were collectively, what is the next stage that arises? Well, that next stage is what we call the Bodhicitta.

In other words the Bodhicitta is not to be thought of as somebody's individual achievement or individual possession; it is not, at the same time, that it is not your individual achievement or your individual possession. It is not that it belongs to the spiritual community instead of belonging to an individual. The concept of belonging, hopefully, is transcended altogether.

The Third Order of Consciousness, extract from 'A Supra-personal Force' Paper

Sangharakshita teaches that this kind of intensity is most likely to come about in a team of committed Dharma practitioners, living a simple shared Dharmic way of life, closely and intensively cooperating together in serving the Dharma. These conditions offer the greatest opportunity to enter the Stream of the Dharma. Within such a Dharma community, will be found the best basis for bodhicitta to arise. This is a key understanding underlying Sangharakshita's founding of the Triratna Buddhist Order and Community.

When people come together who deeply share a common vision and purpose, their efforts combine in a momentum that draws them all onward, beyond themselves. This is Sangha. If they are able to join in real harmony, with openness and mutual trust, then the weaknesses of each are obviated and their strengths contributed selflessly to their shared Dharma service. Between them they set up a powerful current, by which they are all simultaneously carried along. If all the conditions of Dharma practice and lifestyle are in place, then an intensity of combination is created out of which something more than the sum of the individuals comes into play – bodhicitta arises, *Dharma-niyāma* processes begin to flow. Sangharakshita stresses that in this kind of situation one does not think of this as happening to any one person in particular – that is not how it is felt. Beyond the personal consciousness of each, arises out of the quality of combination of all, a consciousness or energy that is supra-personal. He has referred to this as a 'third order of consciousness':

This consciousness is not the sum total of the individual consciousnesses concerned, nor even a kind of collective consciousness, but a consciousness of an entirely different order for which we have no word in the English language but to which the Russian word *sobornost* perhaps gives a clue.

The Order and the Third Order of Consciousness

For members of the Triratna Buddhist Order, the Order itself is the primary setting for this kind of experience. When they receive ordination, Order members are in effect committing themselves to help bring it about. Actually, it is not even that it needs bringing about: for it is already there. The Order was founded, as we have seen, by what Sangharakshita could only describe as that supra-personal force or energy, initially working through him, now through others too. At ordination, rather, one offers oneself as a vehicle for that force or energy that already is active within the Order. One commits oneself to participating in it. One undertakes to establish in one's life the conditions by which this may happen: wholehearted Dharma practice, work with others to serve the Dharma, and a renouncing lifestyle. And to the extent that we all do that, then the Order will continue 'literally' to be the thousand-armed, eleven-headed Avalokitesvara.

For some this talk of a 'supra-personal force' or 'third order of consciousness' is mere rhetoric or

even wishful thinking. They can point to all the problems in the Order: the disharmony, the unskilfulness, the confusion, even the spiritual limpness. And that is there for the seeing, it cannot be denied – although there is much else to be witnessed, even of ordinary virtue and good sense. Some, whether Order members or not, may not experience anything of a self-transcending kind within the Order. One cannot insist that they do when they do not, nor can one prove its existence to them by rational argument. But many of us do experience something of this kind and most of us have come to the Order because of it.

One can, for instance, often experience an atmosphere, hovering in and out of focus, at Order gatherings, especially at Order Conventions, or on certain retreats or the like. Suddenly it seems that everyone is lifted beyond themselves and participates in a shared consciousness that denies the individuality of none yet is more than each: that 'third order of consciousness' of which Sangharakshita speaks, beyond both individual and collective consciousness.

That force is a potentiality that may come into play when Order members and others come together with sufficient intensity and depth to serve the Dharma. Generally speaking, the more they are in direct contact with other members of the Order, the more likely it is that the spark will flash. However, this should not be taken to mean that they must necessarily be in face-to-face contact all the time. The experience of solitude, even prolonged, is a very important ingredient. Solitude, on the basis of Dharma practice, intensifies one's sense of existential aloneness, which is the only basis for a real connection with others.

When one allows oneself to feel that aloneness fully, then even solitude will be experienced in the context of connection with others. Sangharakshita, for instance, has described his experience on a long secluded retreat in the very early days of the Order. He had had no contact with other Order members for some weeks, yet he said he could sense them as though seated all around him, even at specific locations in a great circle. If one's contact with people is sufficiently vivid, being physically apart from them does not break the connection. Similarly, Sangharakshita has said that, once he had left India, he did not feel the need to maintain a correspondence with his teacher, Dharmo Rimpoche, because he never felt separated from him.

The Order itself is then Order members' primary setting for collective service of the Dharma and it is, in my own experience, effective as such, generally speaking. That can especially be felt when Order members gather together in large numbers – which is why such gathering is so important. Those are, however, rare occasions, bringing together a special set of circumstances that cannot, for practical reasons, usually be sustained for more than a few days. If we truly want to let what feels like a supra-personal force work through us to transform the world, we need to bring conditions of that kind together in daily life. We need to find ways of engaging effectively with Order members and others to serve the Dharma on the basis of Dharma practice and lifestyle. What then emerges is a living culture or atmosphere that immediately strikes others who come in contact with it. At its best, this kind of culture carries something more than the sum of what each individual brings to it – something even of the thousand-armed Avalokitesvara.

Most Order members surely do their best to bring into their everyday lives all the factors that will enable them to contribute to the Order as Avalokitesvara – although no doubt we could all do much more. Different individuals have different resources, circumstances, temperaments, capacities, and inclinations – all of which leads to a variety of different ways of practising, of serving the Dharma, and of living. Valuable as this diversity may be, it has a diffusing effect, especially with the Order's geographical spread and growth in numbers, making it more difficult for all to retain a sense of collective service of the Dharma. Some, no doubt, are so thoroughly steeped in the Order that they never cease to sense their participation in it, whether or not they gather often with other Order members. Most however will need regular direct contact with others who share their aspiration if they are to retain a living sense of shared Dharma service.

This is why the Order needs channels of regular contact between groups of Order members – and from time to time between all Order members, or at least as many as can or will make the effort to gather. We come together to reinforce our collective sense of serving the Dharma – so that we can allow the possibility of Avalokitesvara becoming embodied in the Order more and more fully. This is the critical importance of the Order's basic structure of chapter meetings, Order days and weekends, retreats, and conventions. This is the purpose of the Order and chapter convenors, locally, regionally, and internationally: to keep this structure alive and healthy. Their regular meetings with each other play an important part in maintaining that sense of harmony in a common purpose.

Despite this framework of cohesion, it would still be very difficult to keep alive and to deepen the spirit of collective service without other factors. The more separate the daily lives of Order members are from those of their brothers and sisters, the more superficial is their sense of serving the Dharma together likely to be, even though they may forgather from time to time. Of course, this depends on individual character and circumstances, and also on depth of commitment and understanding. Some, indeed, can be physically distant from others, yet feel themselves in the midst of the Order; many, however, perhaps most, cannot.

The difficulties that follow when most Order members do not frequently overlap with others is very evident in India, where almost all are married with families and in regular employment in very demanding conditions. Despite their impressive sincerity and devotion, it is a struggle for most to keep alive in their everyday experience a sense that they are participating in a spiritual community with a shared service of the Dharma – notwithstanding their unquestionable faith in their teacher and the Order. No doubt this will be true for many Order members in the West, too, although conditions are generally far more favourable to them doing so, should they choose to take advantage of them.

Something else is needed. The entire body of the Order is able, it would seem, to sustain a sense of collective service if there are sufficient members who do overlap on a daily basis, sharing lives and work. Where Order members come together on the right basis in communities, common projects, and personal interactions of various kinds, an intensity can be built that affects the whole Order. Those living collective Dharma lifestyles benefit themselves, but they also contribute to the larger

whole. They generate through their interaction a social field or culture that communicates itself to other Order members – and indeed more widely.

It is for this reason that Sangharakshita continues strongly to recommend the same lifestyle as he has always done: living in a single-sex community, working in a team-based Right Livelihood business, helping out at a Dharma centre, living on support not wages, not accumulating family responsibilities if one does not already have them, and not allowing one's sexual activity to become central to one's way of life.

Of course he makes this recommendation recognising that it is possible to practise the Dharma effectively without involving oneself with all or any of the 'semi-monastic' institutions. It is also worth stating that it is not enough merely, for instance, to live in a single-sex community. At times it seems that some have identified the simple fact of living in that way with Dharma practice and service. Quite a number of communities have persisted more or less as shared accommodation, rather like a student flat – although sometimes occupied by rather ageing students! There is little deep and effective engagement with each other and little wider contribution to the Dharma – while some with heavy family duties and responsible jobs to hold down are making vigorous efforts in their Dharma practice, actively working for the Dharma, and participating fully in the life of the Order. Lifestyle choices can provide opportunities – but opportunities must be taken.

However, taking into account all possible exceptions, he still considers that the semi-monastic lifestyle offers the best balance of freedoms and opportunities for most people to make real progress in the Dharma. Furthermore, he teaches that the Community as a whole needs sufficient people living and working together in that intensive way so as to sustain that field or culture imbued with the spirit of the Dharma.

New society

At its best, such a field or culture may be filled with an atmosphere, even a force, that is more than the sum of the individuals concerned. From time to time, this has happened, in my experience, in various situations over the years - indeed, not so infrequently. Often there has been insufficient maturity among leaders and others for that delicate combination to endure for more than a few months or weeks, even days or minutes – but for a while it was there, like the coming down to earth of that 'beautiful iridescent ball' Sangharakshita metaphorically saw hovering in the air when he was initiating his very first Dharma work. In such cases, after some time that delicate balance is lost and either the institutions fail or transmute into something less ideal, for the time being.

There are, however, some situations in the movement that have matured and are able to sustain the delicate combination over time so that the sense of something greater than the individuals concerned is never too far away. I am myself aware of a number of such in the UK and in India from my own direct experience – and no doubt there are others elsewhere of which I am unaware.

There is quite a range of factors that can be discerned in all these situations, such as a degree of

stability and collective experience, sound organisation and effective financial management, and a leadership that is able to maintain a Dharmic direction whilst facilitating a wide participation. One of the most striking elements in them is that there is a core of people who are in very active and regular deep contact with each other – and contact here means face to face, daily contact. Almost always that core of people will be working together on a project that serves the Dharma, the more directly the better. Very often, most of those key people will be living together in communities, whether all in the same one or in a number of communities that have a lot of interaction between their members.

Once that kind of atmosphere exists, others who are not so closely involved can readily participate in it and contribute to it. It may even be possible for those who have little direct contact to feel themselves part of it, too, whether their connection is mediated by letters or social networks or by imaginative means. However, for that to be possible, there needs to be a core of people who live and work together in a strong and effective way.

It is this culture, gathering round a group of Order members intensively sharing their lives and work, that Sangharakshita has called the 'New Society'. Although the term 'New Society' is not much in favour these days, it would seem, the idea behind it is as important as ever, if we are truly to fulfil our aspirations. It is not so much a collection of institutions, although these will be essential, but an intensive atmosphere generated from collective efforts that can carry the spark of what transcends us as individuals. The New Society is, as it were, a force-field generated by collective service of the Dharma. It is something that can be directly felt and is powerfully attractive to many who come in contact with it, giving a direct glimpse of what they are seeking. The New Society is, one could say, the concrete expression of what it was that founded the Order and movement – what seemed to Sangharakshita to have been like 'a supra-personal force or energy' that worked through him. And the New Society is one of the principal means whereby that force or energy is sustained and reaches out to touch many others.

We Shall Become a Bodhisattva, *extract from 'The Precious Garland Seminar'*,
Padmaloka 1976

S: I tend to think - I don't know whether there's any sort of support for this in Buddhist literature but I tend to think that the Bodhicitta is more likely to arise through the interaction of a number of dedicated individuals. You could say that when spiritually committed individuals, are in intense communication, spiritual communication, then the Bodhicitta is that higher third that arises. When you get a number of spiritually committed individuals, and when the spiritual communication between them reaches a certain pitch of intensity, there is the Bodhicitta in the midst of them. It isn't anybody's individual possession, but it, as it were, hovers over the heads of all of them and creates a sort of higher kind of unity, which is even greater than the the unity of the spiritual community. The spiritual community becomes a sort of spiritual body, you could say. Or the spiritual community itself becomes, 'collectively', inverted commas of course, a Bodhisattva. This is why I sometimes say that the figure of the eleven headed and thousand armed Avalokitesvara is a symbol of the Order.

Q: Do you think that it's premature to think something like that, perhaps of a much more diluted nature, exists already?

S: Hmmm, probably it isn't premature to think that. But what I was going to say was one shouldn't think in terms of 'I shall become a Bodhisattva' but 'we shall become a Bodhisattva'.

I think it's the sort of thing that develops when a number of people have worked together spiritually for some time. That is the next level of development when a sort of higher power, if you like, arises within them and to which they all are sensitive, and which, as it were, guides them. You could say it's their common sense, (chuckles) or their common spirit. It's as though it's not separate from them. It's not the sum total of them, but at the same time it's not apart from them, in the sense of imposing itself on them from outside. It doesn't belong to anybody, it belongs to everybody, or you could say it belongs to everybody without belonging to anybody. It doesn't belong to each one individually, separately; it doesn't belong to all of them together collectively. It's another category, another mode altogether.

Study area 3. The Altruistic Dimension and The Dharma Revolution

Summary and Reading

The second topic we will be studying on this retreat is Sangharakshita's teaching on acting as a Bodhisattva and building the 'Buddha Land', or, we could say, the Dharma Revolution.

The information below is a summary of the main points taken from talks given by the team at Tiratanaloka as well as extracts from seminars, talks and papers written by Sangharakshita and Subhuti. It provides a summary of the main areas we'll be looking at, as well as some questions we'd like you to consider.

Required reading

The main text, as before, is Subhuti's paper '**A Supra-Personal Force**'.

Optional study material

Subhuti's essay 'The Dharma Revolution and the New Society' which can be found on his website www.subhuti.info

You may also want to read Sangharakshita's original teachings on the 'New Society' and 'Blueprint for a New World' which are found in a booklet called 'Buddhism for Today and Tomorrow' which can be downloaded in PDF form at www.sangharakshita.org. You can also listen to the talks on Free Buddhist Audio. Please note that they were given in 1976, long before a lot of the institutions we are familiar with were set up.

The Altruistic Dimension and The Dharma Revolution (a summary taken from talks given at Tiratanaloka)

We have looked at how we might open up to the Bodhicitta, both individually and collectively, but of course the Bodhisattva path does not end at our friends, we expand our circle of awareness and practice to include the wider world. As the project of constructing a fixed and separate self identity is weakened, we naturally feel more connected with others. As we become aware of the true nature of pratītya samutpāda we see how painful the cyclical aspect of conditionality is and also how creative conditionality, the spiral path, is possible. We become aware of the spiritual potential of ourselves and others and we long to make that possible in whatever way we can.

So the Bodhisattva has a task, a task to build the Buddhakṣetra or Buddha Land. Another way of putting it is that as the ego project is abandoned, the Buddha land project is undertaken. The Bodhisattva makes a vow to build a land where people can realise Enlightenment for themselves. As the Vimalakirtinirdesa explains, the Buddha Land is only a Buddha Land to the extent that living beings are developed, realise Buddha wisdom and increase their spiritual faculties. This involves relieving external suffering and creating good conditions for people to follow the Dharma, as well as making available the teachings themselves:

*'To lead a Buddhist life we need, above all, 4 things:
A vision of the kind of person we could become;
Practical methods to help us transform ourselves in the light of that vision;
Friendship to support and encourage us on the path;
And a society or culture that supports us in our aspirations.'*³²

The Bodhisattva path involves helping to create conditions where the Dharma can flourish.

How do we create the Buddhaland?

The first thing is to reflect on what really helps the world and perhaps challenging our own assumptions. Dr Ambedkar reflected on this question when he was working out how to eradicate untouchability in India. His ultimate conclusion was that political, economic and social solutions, though vital, were not enough. There needed to be a change in 'mind and soul'³³. He thought that it is the Buddha-Dharma which can help transform the world because it involves a change in each person's mind as well as society. When outlining his reasons why he thought the world needs the Dharma, he offered an exhortation to Buddhists around the world: *'the duty of a Buddhist is not merely to be a good Buddhist, his duty is to spread Buddhism. They must believe that to spread Buddhism is to serve mankind'*.³⁴

Q: What do you think the world needs and is there a particular area where you feel you can contribute?

Q: Do you believe that Buddhism serves mankind (or humankind!) and that the world need the Dharma more than anything else? What are the implications of holding this view?

Q: What would a Buddhaland look like in our own world, at our local Centre, in our home and at work?

There are many ways of helping create a Buddhaland just as there are many individuals who go about creating it, all with different interests and talents. Some are explicitly spreading the Dharma, or helping support the spread of the Dharma, some are helping to change unhelpful attitudes in society and some are more directly relieving immediate suffering. We could explore some of these areas in the groups.

*'The important thing is that the Dharma should be communicated to as many people as possible and this means communicating the Dharma in as many different ways as possible - always assuming, of course, that it is in fact the Dharma that is being communicated. In other words my own personal limitations should not be the limitations of the Order. The Order should not be simply Sangharakshita writ large. Avalokiteshvara has a thousand hands, and each of the thousand hands holds a different object. Similarly, Order members of particular temperaments have different talents, aptitudes, and capacities, and in making their respective contributions to the life and work of the Order they should allow - you should allow - those talents, aptitudes, and capacities full scope. The Order should be a rich and many-splendoured thing, with all kinds of facets. It doesn't have to be just a lotus-lake, or even a series of lotus-lakes. It can also be a rose garden, or a cabbage patch, as you prefer.'*³⁵

In creating the Buddhaland, we come up against our own limitations, which are really another expression of the tension between self and other. We can easily feel disheartened. We may have a sense of our small life in the face of the great project of aiding the development of all beings. We may realise that although we are aspiring Bodhisattvas, we are not operating from universal wisdom and love. When we experience this tension, we can retreat into subjectivity by getting defensive and justifying a more self oriented lifestyle or practice, or we become despondent thinking that 'no point so I may as well not try.'

This is because we are imagining that we can engage in Bodhisattva activity in our current state of being and have an idea of 'me' saving 'the world'.

*'When the notion of suffering and beings leads him to think:
'Suffering I shall remove, the weal of the world I shall work!'
Beings are then imagined, a self is imagined, -
The practice of wisdom, the highest perfection, is lacking.'*³⁶

That only adds to the ego project. To become a Bodhisattva, we have to put ourselves in conditions where our consciousness expands beyond the gravitational pull of the self. We

need an intense Dharma practice and communication with others. Building the Buddha Land has to come from serving a greater vision than ourselves.

Q: What conditions support you to work for the Dharma or others more effectively? What are your next steps in working more effectively?

Sangharakshita talks about the Bodhisattva vow as: *'I place no limit on what I am prepared to do for other living beings, when the time is ripe and I am ready'*³⁷ We have to be ready, we have to know ourselves and our needs. Some people need to be helped to stop doing everything for everyone else, while some need to be encouraged to help out a bit more! Perhaps the best thing we could do in order to become a Bodhisattva is to go on solitary retreat or go to mitra study.

Q: Which of these categories do we find ourselves in - do we do too much for others at the expense of ourselves, or could we do a bit more?

The other pitfall we might face is putting our focus on sorting out the world instead of ourselves. This leads us to the near enemies of building the Buddhaland, which look like altruistic activity, but are based in a sense of anxiety and unease.

Near enemies of building the Buddhaland

Spiritual bypassing: we bypass the work we need to do on ourselves so we can take responsibility for others. The Buddha said it is better to work on your own spiritual welfare and not help others on their spiritual journey, than to help others and not work on your own spiritual welfare. However, best of all is to help both yourself and others³⁸.

In reality our own spiritual welfare and the welfare of others are inseparable. *'You cannot really gain Enlightenment for the benefit of others unless you are a person of considerable spiritual development yourself, and you cannot develop spiritually yourself unless you are at the same time mindful of the needs of other people. In the long run spiritual individualism and spiritual altruism coincide'*³⁹

Martyrdom: the view that it has to be difficult, painful and suffering otherwise it is not altruistic activity. We have to remember that building the Buddhaland is about joy: the joy of serving the Dharma and the joy of practising the perfections. The spiral path is characterised by the unfolding of positive emotion and it is positive emotion that we are encouraging and inspiring in others.

Compulsive Activity: This is common among people who often get into the role of 'rescuer'. We find ourselves very busy helping others sometimes to mask our own feelings of unworthiness or dissatisfaction. Sangharakshita talks about Bodhisattva activity as being undertaken within the 'mandala of aesthetic appreciation'. In this way we see the practical work of helping others taking place in the wider context of delight and

play, the beauty of spiritual practice. You yourself are a work of art, your spiritual practice is beautiful and adorns the Sangha. You don't have to do anything to prove your worth, you just practice the Dharma, become the Dharma. *'You don't have to justify your existence by being useful. You yourself are the justification for your existence'*⁴⁰

Q: Do we have a tendency to feel we have to justify our existence by being useful? If so, how can we work with it?

Over-responsibility: This is underpinned by the view that we are the one who has to take the final responsibility and we are alone in our journey. We could call this 'the myth of the lonely heroine' that runs through a lot of myths and stories. In truth, no one person can become a Bodhisattva, it is a collective practice, something that we participate in but not become individually. *'One shouldn't think in terms of 'I shall become a Bodhisattva, but 'we shall become a Bodhisattva.'*⁴¹

The Bodhisattva we participate in is the Order – set up by the Bodhicitta working through Sangharakshita. The Order is literally Avalokitesvara, and we assist that work, co operate with the Bodhisattva of the Order.

This means working together, *'we will best achieve our Dharma goal..., if we serve the Dharma together – and that means making a conscious effort to mould our living so that we can spend substantial portions of our lives in as much contact with each other as possible. Then we will share a deep sense of serving the Dharma, side by side. Then we will be able to do what needs to be done, for our own and the world's well being, because that supra-personal force or energy will work through the Order more vigorously than ever.'*⁴²

Subhuti has made the astute point that our organisations will only be effective in terms of the Dharma if they are formed out of Sangha⁴³. This perhaps is something you may have experienced: people are drawn to and inspired not just by the Dharma itself, but by the relationships between those communicating it. In order to participate in the Bodhicitta and bring about the Buddha Land, it isn't enough to work for others on our own, we have to participate in the life of the Order, at least to whatever extent we can,.

Q: How do the near enemies manifest in our lives? Is there a particular one you can fall into? What might be the antidote?

Subhuti says that the urgent need for the renewal of Buddhism depends on the renewal of Sangha, and we could also say that the urgent renewal of a peaceful world depends on the renewal of Buddhism, which depends on the renewal of Sangha. The task of creating an effective and sustainable Sangha is possible for each and every one of us, it's within our sphere of influence. Sangharakshita pointed out that the future of the Order, of the

Movement is in our hands. It is in all of our hands, and it is our collective faith and commitment that can nurture the Sangha for the sake of all beings.

The Spiritual Force at Work in the Universe, *extract from 'The Precious Garland Seminar', Padmaloka 1976*

S: Does the Bodhisattva seem like a person in any recognizable sense? Can one really imagine, can one actually think of someone who stays for a limitless time in the world, and seeks the limitless qualities of Enlightenment for limitless embodied beings, and performs virtuous actions without limit? It really baffles the mind doesn't it? So therefore what sort of impression does one get about the Bodhisattva?

Q: Beyond man?

S: Beyond man. And not only beyond man but, beyond, even individuality as we, usually recognize it. Its almost as though the Bodhisattva is a sort of impersonal spiritual energy. So when the Mahayana describes the Bodhisattva, it's as though it isn't describing an individual at all and therefore it's not expecting us to behave like that literally. It's as though the Mahayana is trying to depict in the figure of the Bodhisattva this spiritual energy, this spiritual force, which is at work in the universe, and of which we can get just a sort of glimpse every now and then. So it is not very realistic for us to be a Bodhisattva like this, we can't really think of it, but what we can do is at least be open to the ideal and hope that to some extent at least the Bodhisattva, or that sort of spiritual energy will be able to manifest through us. That seems more realistic as it were, and in a way more true.

But if you take the words of the Mahayana scriptures very literally, then you have to say that "I am going to become a Bodhisattva, I am going to perform infinite good deeds, I'm going to establish a Buddhaland, I'm going to liberate an infinite number of beings", but does one feel that one really is in a position to even aspire to this? Can one imagine oneself as an individual actually doing all this? So it seems that it would be more practical if we take the Bodhisattva as representing this universal if you like, or even omnipresent, spiritual energy which is at work in the universe, tending to the good, tending to the emancipation, tending to the enlightenment of all living beings, and we can to be a channel of that within our own particular sphere, within our own particular context, our own particular life.

It is not that you as an individual are going to be a Bodhisattva in this sort of cosmic sense, but that there is a Bodhisattva, or the Bodhisattva, at work, and one will assist and co-operate in that work, make oneself a channel for that sort of energy. You can't appropriate to yourself as an individual the attributes and qualities, and activities and vows, of the Bodhisattva.

So it's as though just as the the Samboghakaya Buddha represents the ideal of Enlightenment outside any historical context, outside space and outside time. In the same way the Bodhisattva represents not a particular individual Bodhisattva, but rather represents what we can call perhaps the spirit of enlightenment at work in the world.

Q: Do you see it in terms of a certain attitude?

S: The Bodhisattva takes a vow to pursue his career for three unthinkable aeons, and to practice each paramita for so many millions of years, well can one quite realistically and honestly make those sort of vows? One can perhaps think in terms of the Bodhisattva spirit at work in the universe, not limited by time, not limited by space and then one's own task is just, to manifest that Bodhisattva spirit within one's own life and within one's own sphere of influence. That would seem to be more realistic and more true, and even in a way more honest. I think one has to stick very close to one's actual situation and not get lost in what are rather unrealistic aspirations.

In a way the Theravada is much more sober, and much closer to the actual facts of the situation, but the Mahayana gives very well the spirit of the whole thing, the spirit of the whole process, within a wider, even a cosmic context. In a way you have to take the two together, take the Theravada as a guide for here and now, day by day practice, and take the Mahayana as a guide to the ideal as it exists outside space and outside time, and independently of one's own rather pathetic efforts.

What I'm trying to do in effect is to make a distinction between an ideal as it exists independent of any concrete situation and the attempt to embody the ideal in the concrete situation. The Bodhisattva as described in the Mahayana scripture corresponds to the Samboghakya Buddha. He's the ideal as it exists outside space and outside time. Not the ideal as realized, which the Buddha represents, but the ideal in process of realization. You could say that therefore the Bodhisattva is the spirit of the higher evolution, but no one situation, no one individual, aspiring to that ideal, can fully express it.

Take the the figure of Avalokitesvara with a thousand arms and eleven heads. The Bodhisattva is so many sided, so omnipresent, doing so much, but it wouldn't be possible for any one person, in any one given historical situation to do all those things. So the Bodhisattva, as an ideal, doesn't represent something to be copied by each individual. That is quite impossible, that would be a contradiction in terms. But an individual is to imbibe the spirit of that, and express it in his own way within his own life and his own immediate situation. So therefore you mustn't take too literally the Bodhisattva's vows about delivering all beings, or throughout the universe, because here it is the Bodhisattva spirit speaking. You will do your bit by delivering those beings who fall within your particular sphere of influence, you will aspire to be just one of the thousand arms of Avalakitesvara. The arm belongs to Avalokitesvara, Avalokitesvara does not belong to the arm. If you think that you have to be the Bodhisattva, well it's like the arm thinking it's got to be Avalokitesvara, or that Avalokitesvara belongs to the arm, whereas in fact it's the other way round - you've got to be an arm of Avalokitesvara.

Otherwise you get into all sorts of contradictory situations if you take some of the things that the Mahayana sutras say literally. Let's say that there are lots of people, thousands of people, all aspiring to be Bodhisattvas and to deliver all beings, won't they get in one another's way? (laughter) So what does that mean? There can only be one Bodhisattva, So there is one Bodhisattva spirit working throughout space and throughout time, and individuals who accept that ideal do their bit

within their own particular sphere, but the idea of each one, as an individual aspiring to that cosmic function, that is ridiculous.

One mustn't think of the Bodhicitta as a thing; even to think of it as a force isn't quite right, but it's better than as a thing, because a force is in movement, a force changes, a force is process, a force is dynamic.

The best that you can say is 'let me be a vehicle of that cosmic Bodhisattva; and let at least a fraction of one of those vows be fulfilled through me.' And that is the more realistic attitude. Otherwise you suffer from, if you're not careful, not only from a spiritual indigestion, but tremendous spiritual inflation. Not that it's a blind, impersonal, force. It's not a force which is personal in any sense that we understand it. It's supra-personal.

‘The Meaning of Friendship in Buddhism’ Lecture, 1992

The first four duties of the friend [in the Sigālaka Sutta, DN31] are identical with the four *Samgrahavastus*, as we call them. The term *Samgrahavastus* is usually translated as ‘the four elements of conversion’, and these four elements of conversion form a part of the seventh *paramita*, the seventh out of the ten Perfections to be practised by the Bodhisattva. Some of you may know the Bodhisattva not only practises the ten *paramitas* or perfections but passes through ten stages of development. The seventh paramita or perfection is what is called *upayaparamita*. *Upaya* means skilful means, and the four *Samgrahavastus* are **part** of *upaya*. So the fact that the four *Samgrahavastus* are called such - that they are called the elements of conversion - is very interesting. It suggests that the best way of converting people is simply by being friends with them. Some people try to convert you to their point of view or their religion almost forcibly. They bring pressure to bear on you, but in Buddhism that’s not the right path. In Buddhism we convert people - if that, in fact, is the right word at all - simply by being friendly. We just make friends, and there’s no need to preach to them. There’s no need to knock on their door and say ‘Have you heard the word?’ whatever that word is. *[Laughter]* Quite a few people have tried to convert me in that sort of way. I’m glad to tell you they didn’t succeed. So if you want to convert someone, so to speak, or to bring that person on to your path, just be friends, just be generous, just share with them whatever you have. Speak kindly and affectionately. Show concern for their welfare, especially their spiritual welfare, treat them in the same way that you treat yourself, and keep your word to them.

So these five things themselves, in fact, constitute a communication of the Dharma. You communicate the Dharma itself by practising friendship in this way. You could even go so far as to say friendship is the Dharma, the Dharma is friendship. If you’re practising friendliness you’re not only practising the Dharma, you’re spreading the Dharma. Now there’s a lot more that could be said on this topic but there’s no time. But I will say a few words about our fourth duty to our friends and companions, which is also the fourth element of conversion. In Sanskrit it is *samanarthata*. In other words, treating our friends and companions like our own self, treating them equally. *Saman* means equal. So we could even say that a friend is, by definition almost, one whom you treat equally, and it’s interesting to note in this connection that the English word ‘Friend’ is etymologically connected with the word free.

Unfastening the bonds by serving the Dharma, 'A Supra-personal Force' Paper

What then does it mean, to serve the Dharma? It means engaging in activity that contributes to the arising within the world of that supra-personal force or energy of bodhicitta, bringing the possibility of the final resolution of all suffering. One is serving not merely an idea, but the highest potentiality within life. Whatever one does, whether it be directly teaching the Dharma, earning money for Dharma work or in other ways providing the practical basis for it, or alleviating suffering in more conventional, 'charitable' ways, one will be striving through that work to bring *Dharma-niyāma* processes into effect.

We should not interpret service of the Dharma in too abstract a way. Serving the Dharma always means serving other people, for there is no Dharma apart from people. The Dharma stream that begins to flow once we die spiritually and are reborn consists of a dependently arising, spiral chain of selfless mental states that encompass and respond to the needs of living beings. The Dharma is inherently compassionate.

While all service of the Dharma is ultimately service of other people, not all service of other people is service of the Dharma. This is a difficult point to clarify, because the same set of actions could express or not express Dharma service: it is, in other words, a question of attitude and perspective. For instance, good parents will sacrifice their own immediate interests to the needs of their children – in India, I have known parents who deprived themselves of food so that their children could eat well and get a good education. By any standards, such behaviour is highly laudable. It may actually represent something of genuine self-transcendence, but most usually it is, in all honesty, a kind of self-interest, because one has included one's own offspring in one's identity – no such sacrifice would likely be made for others' children.

Much charitable activity emerges from an imaginative identification with the sufferings of others, putting oneself in their place. From the Dharmic point of view, this kind of positive extension of one's sympathy to others is very much to be encouraged, both for the direct effect it has on those in need and for the karmic effect it has on the doer. Indeed, this is what the 'mundane' practice of *metta-bhāvanā* is about. When one sincerely works to help others, one is performing a skilful act that will modify the way in which one's own mind unfolds in accordance with the karmic kind of conditionality. Highly meritorious as this is however, it is not, in itself, service of the Dharma.

We serve the Dharma to the extent that we understand the Dharma's full significance as the truth about the way things are and as the dynamic principle that is ultimately the only way that suffering can be relieved. In other words, we can only truly serve the Dharma to the extent that we have realised it. It follows then that when we meditate, study, and reflect upon the Dharma, we serve the Dharma. On the basis of our understanding we do whatever we can to bring that dynamic principle into effect in the world, whether it be by teaching the Dharma to others, working within the

institutions of the Sangha, or helping people with their most immediate sufferings – or sacrificing ourselves so that our children get a good schooling.

Sangharakshita offers a note of caution on this topic. Relieving material sufferings, such as hunger, disease, or social exclusion, is highly meritorious in terms of the karmic kind of conditionality, and may be a means of bringing the force of the *Dharma-niyāma* into play and therefore of serving the Dharma. Nonetheless, there is a very great need for spreading the Dharma, in the most direct sense, and for building the institutions of the Sangha, so that many people may have the circumstances that will enable them to practise the Dharma. After all, there are many people of good will who can do charitable work, but there are relatively few committed Buddhists to serve the Dharma – and even fewer members of the Triratna Buddhist Order, who are fortunate to have such a clear and effective presentation of the Dharma to offer.

It is the Dharma that transforms charitable work so that it becomes the means of connecting with the real solution to suffering. For this reason, Sangharakshita has always stressed that he would like the major efforts of as many Order members and mitras as possible to go into service of the Dharma in this sense.

Blueprint for a New World, *extract from the lecture 1976*

If we do find the idea of a new world attractive, this is presumably for the same reason that we find the idea of anything new attractive: because we are not really satisfied with the old model.

However, when we say that we are dissatisfied with the old world, what exactly do we mean? Are we dissatisfied with the earth, with the flowers or the trees? Well, no. When we say that we are dissatisfied with the world, we generally mean that we are dissatisfied with certain aspects of corporate human existence, with certain social, economic, and political arrangements, even with the quality of human life. We are all of us, in one way or another, dissatisfied with the world in this sense. The real question to ask ourselves is: are we dissatisfied enough? Does our dissatisfaction go deep enough? Or is it like the motorist's dissatisfaction with his or her car? Yes, one would like a quieter and more powerful engine, power-assisted steering, air bags, more leg-room in the back, and so on. But to what extent is one dissatisfied with that mode of transport as such? To what extent is one really dissatisfied with polluting the air with exhaust fumes or with a way of life that obliges one to spend hours hunched over the wheel instead of walking?

We may be dissatisfied with the amount of money we earn, but our dissatisfaction does not extend so readily to the very idea of working for a wage. We may be dissatisfied with our personal relationships, but do we ever get round to being dissatisfied with the emotional dependence on which those relationships are usually based? We tend to be more dissatisfied with the economic and political status of the country we belong to than we are with nationalism and the whole concept of the sovereign national state. We may be dissatisfied with wars and conflicts all over the globe, but not with those things for which people go to war.

What I'm suggesting is that we do not really want a new world at all; we only want an improved version, perhaps merely a slightly improved version, of the old world. The world that I have in mind, however, is an entirely new world, a world radically different from the old one. This new world will be a world in which we relate to one another as individuals, a world in which we are free to develop to the utmost of our potential, and in which the social, economic, and political structures will help us to do that. The new world will be, in short, a spiritual community – a spiritual community writ large. Our aim, therefore, must be to transform the present world into a spiritual community. This is the only new world that is worth having, the only new world worth working for.

But how are we to bring about this transformation? How are we even to begin? First of all, we must reconcile two apparently divergent views as to how best to go about instituting the kind of radical change I am envisaging. The first view says we must change the system. People are basically all right as they are; they are simply unlucky enough to live under the wrong system. All we need to do, therefore, is replace the wrong system with the right one, and we shall then have a new world in which everybody will be happy. The second view says that change must come from the bottom up; that it is simply up to the individual, as the basic unit of society, to change. Those who hold this

view may go so far as to think that the individual human being is greedy, selfish, and stupid, and that all the world's troubles are due to this simple fact. Wars occur because people feel hatred, economic crises occur because people are greedy. It follows that to change the world we must change ourselves: we must become contented, unselfish, generous, and wise. The first view, that we must change the system, is generally regarded as the secular view, and the second, which is a sort of moral appeal – sometimes a vehement moral appeal – to the ordinary individual, is generally regarded as the spiritual view.

In fact these views are not mutually exclusive. Spiritual movements, especially those that trace their descent from 'the wisdom of the East', are generally expected to adopt the spiritual view, but if this is so, the [Triratna Buddhist Community] is an exception. Yes, the development of the individual is fundamental in transforming the world; but at the same time it is important to recognize that external conditions can help or hinder us in our development. Whatever the external conditions, we have to want to develop and we will always have to exert ourselves. But we must also acknowledge that if we live under the right system, it is easier to develop, and if we live under the wrong system, it is more difficult.

This becomes clear on a retreat. A retreat involves a number of people going to a beautiful, quiet place in the country for a weekend, or a week, or a month (retreats come in all shapes and sizes). Except for taking turns at cooking, washing dishes, or perhaps some gardening, the participants do not work. Instead they meditate perhaps three or four times a day, they chant together, they take part in pujas, they listen to talks, and they have discussions or study Buddhist texts. In other words, for a time the conditions under which people live are changed; they are provided with conditions that are more conducive to personal development. And in these improved conditions, people change. One can see this happening literally before one's eyes. Sometimes people change dramatically, even after just a few days. They might arrive on the retreat feeling worried, harried, anxious, tired, and irritable – but gradually they become more relaxed, they cheer up, they begin to smile and laugh and seem glad to be alive. They become more aware of themselves, of one another, of their surroundings, of nature, more aware that they are living and breathing on this earth. They also become more free and spontaneous, more themselves. Although I have seen this happen many times, each time the change occurs it seems almost magical.

Unfortunately, however, the retreat must end, and everyone has to go back to wherever they came from. And it is noticeable that people who have experienced a retreat for the first time can be quite reluctant to leave. They can even become tearful at the prospect of going back to less helpful conditions. Indeed, because we generally have to return to a boring or otherwise stressful job, to a noisy crowded city, or to a difficult domestic situation, the change in us does not always last. Nevertheless there is one lasting benefit: we have seen that it is possible to change, that – given the right conditions – we can develop. On retreat we experience, at least to a small extent and for a short time, what the new world could be like. We can even say that on a small scale a retreat *is* a new world. It shows us that the idea of transforming the world into a spiritual community is more

than a mere hypothesis. It shows us that the new world need not exist only in the imagination; it is not just a dream.

So what are we to do? The answer is really quite simple. If we want to build a new world, we must expand the nucleus of a new society [the Triratna Buddhist Community and Order] into the old world. This expansion represents the activity of the spiritual community; it is not just the individual actions of individual committed Buddhists, but rather the actions of *teams* of committed Buddhists. Such teamwork can radically transform two fundamental aspects of our lives: what we do to earn a living, and where we live.

The Dharma Revolution and the New Society, *extract*

The Dharma can be revolutionary – indeed, the Dharma is revolutionary, when it truly is the Dharma. When the Dharma is genuinely understood and practised on a wide enough scale, there will be a significant change for the better in society.

This is not merely theory: we have solid evidence that it can be true. In 1956, the great Indian statesman and Buddhist leader, Dr. Ambedkar, precipitated a social revolution in India on the basis of the Dharma, affecting the lives of millions of 'Dalits', people who were formerly considered untouchable by their fellow Hindus. When large numbers of these people converted to Buddhism, they gained a new confidence in themselves and began to take their rightful place in society. The effects of this revolution are evident in statistics showing the much greater improvement in social and economic status of those who became Buddhists compared with similar castes in which very few conversions took place. This gives us an important illustration of what Dharma revolution means.

Dr Ambedkar saw the Dharma as the best, even the only, way to bring about something like an ideal society – a 'new society'. He defined such a society in terms of liberty, equality, and fraternity, which for him were deep spiritual principles, derived not from the French Revolution but 'from the teachings of my master, the Buddha'. There is liberty when people are free to live the kind of life they consider best – so long as they do not harm or infringe the liberty of others. Equality means that everybody has broadly the same opportunities, at least to begin with – although he was quite clear that not everybody is equal in talent, ability, intelligence, or character. And fraternity, which is perhaps the area where he has the most interesting things to say, means an attitude of respect and reverence of each citizen for every other. This he equates with democracy itself: democracy is not merely a means of choosing a government, but a state of mind, he says, a fraternal attitude that is ultimately one of metta or loving-kindness that expresses itself in moral action – sila or morality being metta in action. Society should, he taught, be founded on ethical principles, which themselves are the expression of respect, reverence, and even of metta, of love.

Dr Ambedkar arrived at his conclusions about the transformative effects of the Dharma after many years of struggle to overcome the terrible historical injustice of untouchability, to which he himself had been subjected simply by his birth. Though born into a caste then considered untouchable, he was fortunate, through the philanthropy of two reformist Maharajas, to get an excellent education in the West and returned to a senior post in the government of one of these princes. However, he soon realised that education was not enough, for he still suffered humiliation and prejudice, for all his Doctorates. 'Modernisation' alone did not bring change. He devoted himself thereafter, with outstanding selflessness, to freeing his people from the oppressions of caste by every means at his disposal: journalism, social agitation, labour organising, legal action, political activism, and even in government – first in the Viceroy's Council and then in the first Cabinet of the independent India, in which he served as Law Minister. He was asked by Pandit Nehru, the first Indian Prime Minister, to

chair the committee that oversaw the drawing up of the Constitution of the Republic of India – and is reported to have done the lion's share of the work himself.

However, even at this pinnacle of personal achievement, he knew that not enough had been done: caste discrimination persisted throughout India, much as it always had, and hundreds of millions of people suffered under its oppressions. When there was resistance in Parliament to his attempts to bring full equality to women by reforming Hindu family law, and Government support was withdrawn, he became finally disillusioned with the political process as a means of eradicating social injustice. He had done so much to give India political democracy and at least the legal basis for social democracy, yet the old attitudes persisted. The problem lay much deeper than laws and constitutions could reach.

‘We built a temple [the Constitution] for a god to come in and reside, but before the god could be installed, the devil had taken possession of it.’

Dr Ambedkar had been thinking deeply about the roots of caste over many years, coming to understand that those roots lay in the mind itself: 'Caste is a notion, a state of mind.' That notion was integrally embedded in the whole Hindu mind-set, entwined with its powerful and superstitious beliefs in a social destiny ordained by the gods. But this insight also suggested the solution: 'What mind creates, mind can undo'. In 1936 he decided that he would leave Hinduism and began the search for another religion, both for himself and for his people. He had definite criteria for his search: such a new religion must enshrine the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, utterly rejecting caste in all its forms. It must also be compatible with reason and science, not enjoining blind belief in supernatural agencies that control human fate. And it should not justify poverty.

He had long been personally drawn to the Buddha and his teaching, both for its spiritual power and its emphasis on social morality. After a sincere exploration of the major world religions, he concluded that this ancient Indian religion was the best one for his people, indeed for all humanity, and, on 14th October 1956 he went for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha himself, and then inducted some 400,000 of his followers into Buddhism. The Dharma Revolution had begun.

For Dr. Ambedkar, real reform comes about only from a change in mental attitudes and outlook on the part of many people in society. It is the Dharma that offers the firmest basis for that change of heart – a change that would express itself in a transformed society that was truly equal, just, and free, underlain by a powerful sense of shared citizenship, even by respect and love between all citizens. He considered this to be true not just for the oppressed castes from which he himself came or even for all Indians – he believed that the Dharma was the surest basis for a truly just society anywhere.

Many of us in the Triratna Buddhist Community share this perspective, which we have learned from our own teacher, Ugyen Sangharakshita, and we are deeply inspired by Dr Ambedkar's teaching and work. What we want to see is the Dharma brought to bear on social, political, and economic questions everywhere. We want the power of the Dharma to transform not only us, but the whole of society. We want to help bring about a Dharma Revolution.

But what does this mean? When I talk about allowing the power of the Dharma to transform us and society, what do I mean, very specifically, by the Dharma and what is its 'power'? We could broadly say that the Dharma is the truth – the way things truly are. If we can see the truth and allow it to guide our actions, even one might say work through us, it represents a kind of force that shapes our thoughts, words, and deeds for the benefit of all.

This requires closer, if brief, examination in more precise Dharmic terms. The Dharma is the truth, the way things are, the true nature of existence, and that can be understood in terms of the three lakshanas – everything is impermanent, nothing has substantial identity, and nothing that is impermanent and insubstantial can offer enduring pleasure, satisfaction, or fulfilment. We can express this also in terms of the more fundamental principle of pratitya samutpada, dependent arising – everything is conditioned: there is no phenomenon, external or internal, that does not arise from previous conditions and provide the conditions for future events. Reality consists of conditioned arising.

Within the overall principle of conditionality, there are two aspects that, from the point of view of personal transformation and the transformation of society, are especially significant: the Karmic and the Dharmic kinds of conditionality – known in Buddhist tradition as the Karma and Dharma 'Niyamas', meaning law in the sense of a scientific law. It is in the working of these two laws that the Dharma's power to transform lives.

We can recognise the Karma principle working in our own experience, as we notice that skilful action leads to a greater sense of fulfilment – and indeed that unskilful action brings pain and frustration. We can see that, as we act more and more in accordance with moral principles, our own consciousnesses become more open, sensitive, and awake.

In the same way, we can discover Dharmic conditionality at work, as we allow it to unfold within us, letting it move us, we might say, beyond ourselves. We can see that principle most clearly exemplified by great beings, especially by the Buddha himself. We can see in his life and in the lives of his great disciples that there is a stream of conditionality that, once fully entered into, leads inevitably onward to complete Enlightenment - the transcendence of all our suffering and the spontaneous unfolding of compassionate activity.

So, when I speak of bringing the power of the Dharma to bear on the social, political, and economic situation, what I mean is bringing the principle of Karma and the principle of Dharma to bear within society so that they transform it in a progressive direction, thereby bringing greater and greater happiness and freedom and fellowship to more and more people. This is the Dharma revolution.

It is our task in the Triratna Buddhist Community to help bring about that Dharma Revolution. And we do it by first developing the nucleus of a new society and then working within the three target areas: the poor and marginalised, the general attitudes and outlook of society, and those who have heard the call to a spiritual life. Then we will be transforming the world - and at the same time, of course, we ourselves will be transformed.

History

Date	Version	Changes
Jan 2015	1	first edition
April 2016	2	editing reading material to make shorter

¹ Sangharakshita, ?

² Sangharakshita, 'Q & A on the Bodhisattva Ideal' Tuscany 1984

³ See Sangharakshita, 'Moving Against the Stream'

⁴ Sangharakshita, 'My Relation to the Order'

⁵ Vin. Mv. 1:7-20

⁶ Sangharakshita, 'Bodhisattva Ideal' Mitrata ?

⁷ Sangharakshita, 'Looking Ahead A Little Way', 1999

⁸ Sangharakshita, History of my Going for Refuge, p82

⁹ See Zizek, 'Western Buddhism'

¹⁰ Sangharakshita, 'My Relation to the Order'

¹¹ Subhuti, 'A Supra-Personal Force...'

¹² See Subhuti, 'Revering and Relying on the Dharma'

¹³ Sangharakshita, 'Living Wisely', Ch2

¹⁴ MN 7

¹⁵ Sangharakshita, 'Survey of Buddhism', 4.4

¹⁶ Sangharakshita, 'Dear Dinoo'

¹⁷ Sangharakshita, 'The Bodhisattva Ideal', p46

¹⁸ Sangharakshita, 'Know Your Mind', p53

¹⁹ Gampopa, 'Jewel Ornament of Liberation'

²⁰ Sangharakshita, The Good Friend, 'Crossing the Stream'

²¹ Ibid p60

²² Sangharakshita, Rights and Duties, 'Crossing the Stream' p36

²³ Ibid, p37

²⁴ Sigalaka Sutta, DN 31

²⁵ Sangharakshita, 'On Being All Things To All Men', lecture

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Sangharakshita, 'Yogi's Joy'

²⁹ Sangharakshita, 'Going for Refuge' 1966

³⁰ AN 4.21

³¹ This passage may be confusing as it indicates more than the three levels of consciousness to which we have been referring. Sangharakshita worked out his understanding of the different levels of consciousness over time. The principle is still the same: the movement of lower to higher levels of consciousness as one practices according to the karma and dharma niyāma processes. In this extract he describes this process in a more expanded way than when he talks about three distinct levels.

³² Sangharakshita, 'Buddhism for Today and Tomorrow'

³³ Dr Ambedkar, 'Annihilation of Caste'

³⁴ Dr Ambedkar, 'Buddha and the Future of His Religion'

³⁵ Sangharakshita, 'My Relation to the Order'

³⁶ Ratnagunasamchayagata

³⁷ Sangharakshita, 'The Bodhisattva Ideal' p68

³⁸ Anguttara Nikaya or Eternal Legacy p44

³⁹ Sangharakshita, 'Going for Refuge', 1981

⁴⁰ Sangharakshita, 'Wisdom Beyond Words' p192

⁴¹ Sanghakshita, 'Precious Garland Seminar' 1976

⁴² Subhuti, 'A Supra-Personal Force...'

⁴³ See Subhuti, 'A Buddhist Manifesto'.